



MAUREEN JENNINGS



THE COMPLETE

MURDOCH

MYSTERIES
Collection



By Maureen Jennings

The Murdoch Mysteries

Except the Dying

Under the Dragon's Tale

Poor Tom Is Cold

Let Loose the Dogs

Night's Child

Vices of My Blood

A Journeyman to Grief

The Detective Inspector Tom Tyler Mysteries

Season of Darkness

Beware this Boy

MAUREEN JENNINGS

The Complete
Murdoch
Mysteries
Collection



MCCLELLAND & STEWART

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A Murdoch Mystery

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Except
the Dying



A Murdoch Mystery



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Acknowledgements

*For Iden, without whose love and support I would
never have got to this point*

*The last night that she lived
It was a common night,
Except the dying; this to us
Made nature different*

—Emily Dickinson

Prologue

They started with the boots, which looked new. They tried to hurry but their fingers were already stiff and clumsy with cold and the buttons were troublesome. The second boot was particularly difficult. She was curled up on her side against the fence and the leather had fastened to the earth in an icy bond. It took both of them to get it off, one holding on to the frozen leg, by now stiff as stone, the other tugging until the boot came away. Next was the waist, a decent black sateen, but in their haste they pulled on her arm too sharply and they heard the bone snap as the elbow dislocated. "Be more respectful," said the younger one.

THE SMELL OF THE extinguished candle lingers sharp and sour in the cold air. At the high, small window the night is a paler square but in the room Therese can see only the massy shapes of the wardrobe and the dresser by the door. Since Mrs. Foy left she has been lying like this under the bedcovers, praying for guidance.

It is not the housekeeper Therese fears, it is the other, who, full of solicitude and wine, has already come to her twice this week. The memory makes her tremble and she sits up suddenly, thinking the stairs have creaked. Not so, just the stable door opening in the yard below. Faintly from the dining room, she can hear the booming voice of the guest, the faint interspersing of her mistress's replies.

She pushes back the quilt and gets off the bed. Except for her outer garments she is fully dressed, but she shivers. Moving fast so there is no room to regret, she packs her meagre belongings into the valise: her second chemise, a pair of drawers, her other grey silk waist for church that she

made herself and her plaid wool skirt. Everything else she possesses she is wearing. On the bedside table is the Bible that Claudette gave her when she left the farm. It is a gift that gives her great comfort even though she cannot read a word. Next to it is her rosary, which she picks up, touching the crucifix to her lips. Then she falls to her knees by the bed and begins to tell her beads.

*Hail Mary, full of grace,
blessed art thou among women,
Hail Mary, full of grace,
blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.*

They removed the felt hat next. The pink velvet flowers around the brim were crushed by the weight of the head and dusted with snow light as sugar. The skirt came off easily, as did the woollen stockings. There were no gloves and, disappointingly, there was no jewellery to speak of – small silver earrings, which they left, and a pretty bead necklace of green glass that had broken and was wrapped around the rigid fingers. One of them started to pull out the wooden combs that pinned up the girl's hair. "No, don't," said the other. "She won't need them now," her companion replied. In the darkness their breath came from their mouths like smoke.

She takes a serge jacket from the hook on the door. She can see her own breath in the cold room, and she wraps her muffler tight around her face. All evening the ice-laden wind has been building, sweeping across the city from the dark lake, worrying at the house. There is a portable oil heater in the corner but she hasn't used it tonight, not wanting to be held accountable for the additional expense. She does not want to leave with any blot on her name.

Father Alphonse said to her, "If you have difficulties, go to talk to the priest, Father Corbiere. He is my friend, he will assist you." But she found that this priest has departed and the new one is an English. He appears hurried and has

impatience with her language. She cannot tell him her troubles even in the confessional box. But last Sunday she found a French-Canadian church and she wept with the joy of the familiar tongue. Perhaps there she can find succour.

At the last moment she returns to the narrow bed, plumps up the pillow and slips it beneath the blue counterpane. From the door in the dark, it looks like a sleeping figure.

The corpse was clad now only in white flannel drawers and chemise, the blue-grey skin of legs and arms blending with the snow where she lay. They considered leaving her, considered stopping at the final indignity, but the cloth of the undergarments was good and they had gone this far. Awkwardly they manoeuvred the body, unyielding as a large doll. The one was shamed by the triangle of hair in the fork of the legs and she tried to bend the knee up to give the girl modesty, but it was impossible. They bundled up the pile of clothes and slipped away into the darkness.

She crosses the bare floor to the door, opens it and peers out, clutching the Bible against her chest as if it could be a shield. She makes her way to the narrow back stairs the servants use and runs down, her feet made light and fast by fear.

Chapter One

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 1895

THE WIND CUT TO THE BONE and Alice Black pulled her shawl tight about her head and throat. The hot gin was a fire in her stomach but no defence against the cold of the winter night. She grumbled to herself, trying to expose as little of her face as she could. She'd expected to do some business at the John O'Neil but none of the piss-makers wanted to pay for a bit of dock tonight. She wiped the back of her hand across her dripping nose. She hoped Ettie had fared better, else it was potato-peel soup for the next few days.

It was getting late. Although the hotel officially closed at the legal Saturday time of seven o'clock, there was a backroom where the regulars could go to top off, and for a cut of the dash, the proprietor, James McCay, usually allowed her and Ettie to stay on.

Alice edged closer to the houses. She was afeard to go past the churchyard where the bodies of the Irish immigrants were laid out in their eternity boxes. Even though the epidemic had happened almost fifty years earlier, for sure ghosts lingered in the area. Not so the cholera. She always held her nose as she scurried by. On this stretch of Queen Street the shops were interspersed with vacant buildings and the boarded-up windows were blinded eyes. The gas lights were few and far between and what with that and huddling into her shawl, she didn't see the young woman walking in front of her until they almost collided.

"Mind where you're goin'," snapped Alice. She heard a muttered "Pardon" as the other one moved out of the way.

She had a thick muffler wrapped around her face, but Alice had an impression of youth, and she wondered where the girl was going by herself at this time of night. A country piece, by the look of that hat and valise.

Alice glanced over her shoulder. The girl was hovering on the sidewalk. She looked lost, and for a moment Alice considered stopping to offer help. But sod it, it was too cold. A gust of wind blew her skirts up about her knees and she struggled to hold them down. At that moment she heard the jingle of harness as a carriage came around the corner heading east onto Queen Street, going a good clip considering the state of the road. The iron-hard ruts had a light covering of snow and they were slippery and dangerous to the horses.

“Get out of the way, you bloody bint,” yelled the driver. Alice jumped back onto the sidewalk just in time. She lost her balance on the snowbank and fell backwards, landing on her tailbone. For a moment she remained sprawled on the hard ground, groaning, then angrily snatched up a handful of snow and threw it in the direction of the carriage. The wind tossed it back in her face. Sodding toady. She shook her fist and suddenly the driver pulled his horse up sharp, wheeled around and headed back in her direction. She shrank back, prepared for recriminations, but the carriage went right past her and halted beside the girl. The door opened and a gloved hand reached out. After a moment’s hesitation, the young woman accepted the help and climbed in. In the flickering yellow light of the gas lamp, Alice saw that the carriage was a smart burgundy colour with brass fittings, the high-stepping horse light-coloured, but the blinds at the windows were pulled down tight and she couldn’t see the occupant.

The driver cracked his whip, wheeled the horse around, and they set off again at a brisk canter back along Queen Street.

Alice got to her feet, rubbing at her rump. She brushed the snow off her skirt, rewrapped her shawl and started to walk. Her stomach was cramping badly and she needed to get home soon. She should've known better than to trust those snaggy sausages of McCay's. If there was a morsel of real pork in there at all she'd be surprised. More like rotten horsemeat, by what it was doing to her stomach.

She was going by the Dominion Brewery now, the pleasurable part of her route. In spite of the increasing urgency of her indigestion, she paused in front of the entrance. The smell of hops hung heavy and sweet on the night air. She sniffed hungrily but the cold made her cough. Sod it. She headed up Sumach Street. Her toes had gone numb. Even though she'd stuffed newspaper into her boots, they were so split they were useless.

"Lucky for that little tit, whoever she is. Gettin' a ride to some warm place. Why'd it never happen to Alice?"

Constable Second-Class Oliver Wicken was looking forward to the end of his shift, when he could warm his feet at the station woodstove. His thick serge uniform and cape kept his body warm enough but his feet were frozen and a chilblain itched painfully on his right heel. He stopped for a moment and stamped to restore his circulation. Since the early hours of the morning a steady snow, soft and pure, had been covering the grey detritus of the week. Now with dawn approaching the wind had got up again, burning his face, and tiny icicles had formed along the edge of his fine blond moustache.

At this hour the streets were empty. He hadn't encountered another living soul during his entire beat except for a bread man in his dray rumbling down River Street. Privately, young Wicken always hoped for a little excitement he could relate to his sweetheart. She was a romantic girl and was always after him to tell her his

adventures. Like he'd told her, the graveyard shift in the winter wasn't going to be lively. The citizens were sealed up tight in their snug houses. Summer was different. Larceny, pickpockets on the increase, violations of Sunday bylaws. And, of course, the flood of drunk and disorderly. Over three thousand cases of D-and-D charged in 1894. Made you want to take the Pledge. Almost.

This month his main task was to check the vacant houses to make sure no vagrants had broken in to get shelter for the night. Toronto was just climbing out of bad times and there were over a thousand properties standing empty throughout the city. The police were placed in charge of protecting them.

He turned north on Sumach Street. He badly needed to relieve himself and he wasn't sure he could hold it until he got to the station. Just up a ways was a dark laneway, and he walked in for a few feet, intending to use one of the outside privies that served the row of houses along St. Luke Street. However, the pressure in his bladder became too urgent and he stopped by the tumbledown fence.

In a hurry to unbutton his trousers, he didn't notice the body immediately, as the whiteness of it was blended into the snow. But two large rats were sniffing at the girl's head, and at Wicken's approach they scurried away like shadows and attracted his attention. He had placed his lantern beside him on the ground and it was only when he raised it aloft that he fully comprehended what he was seeing.

He went close enough to confirm the girl was dead and then spun around and ran as fast as he could to the telephone signal box that stood on the corner of Wilton and Sumach. Panting, he tugged free his key, opened the box and grabbed the receiver off the hook. He turned the crank and waited for what seemed endless moments until the police operator at central headquarters answered. Wicken could hardly hear him above the usual static and hiss of the

telephone. He yelled, "Connect me with number-four station. It's an emergency."

Chapter Two

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 10

ACTING DETECTIVE WILLIAM MURDOCH crouched beside the dead girl and lifted the dark hair away from her face. Despite the pallor of death, there was still a sweetness in the curve of her cheek, the skin unmarked by life's experience. He felt a pang of pity at the sight. Behind him Constable Crabtree shifted nervously and the ambulance driver leaned over from his seat to gape. Fortunately, the gathering crowd at the entrance to the laneway were being kept in check by young Wicken, but even at this early hour on the Lord's Day a ragtag mob had formed, roused by the clanging alarm. One man had even brought out a stool to stand on so he could see better.

"Fetch a blanket, will you, Crabtree?" Murdoch called over his shoulder to his constable.

He sat back on his heels, shielding the body as best he could. The girl was lying on her back close to a rickety wooden fence. On the left side of her body were the purple marks of lividity. Rigor mortis was advanced, the head unmovable, the arms and legs frozen. Her eyes were closed, and he lifted one eyelid. The pupil was a mere pinprick in the light blue iris. The right eye was the same. He bent and sniffed at her mouth but there was no detectable smell of liquor. At first sight the cause of death was not apparent, no blood or obvious wounds. He leaned closer. There were three small bruises at the left wrist. He placed his own fingers on the spots. They fit. There was also a largish contusion on the inside of the forearm and another at the elbow. Gingerly, he examined her hands. The nails were cut

short and there was nothing caught there that he could see. He ran his finger over the cold flesh of her palm, feeling the slight roughening. He brushed aside the snow and checked her feet. The toenails were likewise clean and there were no scratches or marks on the soles.

"Here you go, sir." Crabtree handed him a grey hospital blanket. "She looks to be about the same age as my sister. Fourteen, if that," he said.

"I'd put her older, myself."

The face was youthful, especially with the thick dark hair loose about her shoulders, but her body was voluptuous, the breasts full and the hips and buttocks rounded. Murdoch covered her over and straightened up, frowning.

"Bloody peculiar, Crabtree, her eyes ..."

He stopped as the police horse whinnied. There was an answering neigh from the street. Wicken was pushing the onlookers back as a two-wheeler turned into the laneway. The constable went over to hold the horse, and the elderly driver got down stiffly. He was wearing an old-fashioned houndstooth cloak and stovepipe hat and his lower face was wrapped in a white silk scarf. When he reached Murdoch he muttered, "Abscess tooth," and indicated the scarf. He looked down at the body.

"... happened here?"

"I don't know, sir," answered Murdoch. "One of our constables found her about forty minutes ago."

He pulled away the blanket so the coroner could see.

"Whoze she?"

"We haven't determined that yet."

"A doxy?"

"I don't think so, sir. She's quite clean and the constable on this beat says he hasn't seen her before."

The coroner indicated the purple stains on the side of the body. "... you move her?"

"No, sir, somebody else did."

"Clothes?"

"Nowhere around. Probably stripped."

"Heathens." He tried to bend closer but the movement caused pain in his jaw and he straightened quickly. "She's dead ... right enough, but I ..." He frowned at Murdoch. "Where've ... seen you before?"

"Last December, sir. The Merishaw case."

"Course, remember now. Shocking ... heathen!"

The Merishaws' servant girl had given birth to a stillborn child and tried to bury the body in the neighbour's front yard, where some children had found it. Arthur Johnson had been the attending coroner in that instance and without the excuse of an abscessed tooth he had been just as perfunctory.

"Bring the body ... morgue postmortem examination ... too cold here ... Get a report ..."

Murdoch didn't make out what he said. "Beg pardon, sir."

Johnson pulled the muffler away from his mouth, then winced as the cold air hit his tooth. There was a waft of oil of cloves in the air. "I'll get an examination done at once and send you the report."

He quickly wrapped himself up again and started back towards his carriage, muttering something else undecipherable. Crabtree gave him a lift up into the seat, and he slapped the reins at the docile bay mare, which trotted off briskly.

Murdoch replaced the blanket. He'd never encountered a situation like this before, and although he'd felt pity for the dead girl he was also keenly aware that it might prove to be a noteworthy case. The notion was agitating. Promotion was difficult to come by in the city's police force. The last few years had been hard economically for the city and the council had refused Chief Grasett's request for a bigger budget. The police force could not expand. Murdoch had been acting detective for three years and unless somebody above him in rank died or retired he was stuck there. Lately he had fretted beneath that yoke, hating the need to kow-

tow to men he despised. There was a chance the dead girl could bring him some glory if he handled himself well.

The constable in charge of the ambulance called out. "D'you think you'll be much longer, Mr. Murdoch? It's perishing cold for the horses."

"Put their blankets on, then."

Richmond was a chronic complainer and lazy to boot. Murdoch had no time for him.

Grumbling, the constable got down from his seat, took two blankets from the back of the wagon and threw them over the horses. Their breath smoked in the cold air. The snow continued to drift down and bits of ice were crusting on Murdoch's moustache from the moisture of his breath. He was grateful for the warmth of his long sealskin coat and forage hat, which he'd acquired in exchange for three plugs of Jolly Tar from a dying prisoner. The nap was gone under the arms of the coat, but it wasn't obvious and his landlady had managed to remove most of the stains.

He motioned Constable Crabtree to come closer.

"We'd better find out who she was. Take down some notes, will you?"

Crabtree took out a black notebook and inserted a piece of carbonized paper between two pages. He was a giant of a man, made taller by his high round helmet and wider by the serge cape. His broad, ruddy face was guileless as a farmer's, but he was shrewd and Murdoch liked and respected him.

"Righto, sir."

"The body is that of a young female between fourteen and sixteen years of age. She has light blue eyes, dark brown wavy hair. She is approximately five foot three inches, and would weigh about nine stone. There is a small wen to the right side of the nose. No scars or pockmarks. She is wearing silver ear hoops. Got that? Before the postmortem examination we'll get some photographs just to be on the safe side. Cavendish is the best for that, and Foster can do

the drawing in case we need it for the papers. When the rigor has passed we'll take proper Bertillon measurements."

Crabtree was surprised. "Is it worth it, sir? You said you don't think she's a slag."

"We might as well. You know how the chief feels."

Chief Constable Grasett was very keen on Bertillonage, and he'd sent all the detectives and acting detectives on a special course the year before. In fact, Murdoch thought the laborious system had its faults, but it was better than nothing, and there were reports, probably exaggerated, of some resounding successes. Murdoch had heard that the American police were experimenting with a method of identification using fingerprints, but so far the Toronto police had no knowledge of it.

He called to Richmond. "Bring over the stretcher."

The constable pulled it out of the wagon and placed it on the ground beside the body. Crabtree went to help him. As they began to lift, the blanket slipped and the forearm and hand appeared, pointing toward heaven as if in supplication. The other man tried to get it covered over again. Murdoch snapped at him.

"Take care with that arm, you'll break it."

Richmond swore under his breath but finally managed to slide the girl over. Crabtree seized the lower handles of the stretcher and the two of them carried it into the ambulance. The driver jumped up on the front seat, clucked to the horses and set off down the lane. There was a burst of excited chatter from the watchers. At the same time a carillon of bells sounded from St. Paul's Church, signalling the Mass. Murdoch sighed to himself. He was a Roman Catholic, but last Sunday he'd stayed in bed reading, and it looked like he'd miss this week too. Father Fair wouldn't be happy; nor would Mrs. Kitchen, his devout landlady.

As Crabtree joined him, Murdoch pointed to the depression where the body had lain.

"Before she was moved, she was lying on her left side facing the fence. Her head was west towards Sackville, feet easterly towards Sumach Street. Her legs were drawn up close to her body and her arms were folded against her chest."

He stepped aside and dropped to the ground, curling himself into the position the girl had been in when she died.

"What does it look like, Crabtree?"

"Like she might have tried to get a bit of protection from the wind here where the shed juts out."

"That's what I thought."

Murdoch clambered to his feet and brushed the snow from his coat.

"Was she hickey?" asked the constable.

"Don't think so. There was no smell of liquor. We'll have to wait for the postmortem examination to be sure. But something was wrong. I don't like the look of it at all. As far as I know, you don't die naturally and have pinpoint pupils. And she was bruised. Could be from somebody gripping her arm hard. If this is a crime we have to be careful. I don't want his nibs using my stampers for boot cleaners, if we've missed something. At the very least we're dealing with desecration of a dead body. Back east they used to say, when you're not sure which way the wind is going to blow, keep your deck clean, your sail up and your Man Thomas down."

Crabtree grinned.

Murdoch took out a retractable tape measure from his inner pocket.

The snow of the last few hours had been steadily filling up any dints, and the coming and going of the constables overlaid whatever prints had been there previously. However, at the edge of the depression where the girl had lain, he saw one clear toe print. It was narrow and pointed, as from a fashionable boot. He measured it carefully.

"Let's have a gander down the lane."

“Are we looking for anything in particular, sir?”

“Fresh droppings of any kind. Nothing’d last more than two days in this place, so we don’t have to worry whether it’s new or not.”

The dirt lane ran parallel to Shuter Street from River Street as far as Yonge. Over at that westerly end within sight of the cathedrals, Shuter was respectable and well tended, most of the residents professional men. You could find more doctors per square inch on Shuter and adjoining Mutual Street than bugs on a pauper’s pillow. Here, though, the houses shrivelled in size and demeanour, taken over by working-class families who were too tired or too indifferent to maintain them. Not even the covering of snow could prettify the narrow-faced, drab houses and untended backyards where the outhouses sat.

Slowly the two officers walked down the lane on each side, but there was nothing out of the ordinary that they could see. At the Sumach Street end they halted, and the people jostling against the rope barricade stared at them. One woman had her child with her, clinging sleepily to her chest underneath her shawl. There was the usual sour odour from clothes that were never washed or removed.

“What’s going on, Officer?” the man on the stool called out.

Murdoch recognized him. “Hello there, Tinney. You’re out early.”

“I didn’t want to miss anything, Sergeant. What’s happening? We heard some tart got a nubbing.”

“You heard wrong.”

“She’s dead, though, ain’t she?” interjected a scrawny red-nosed youth.

“Unfortunately she is that. So listen, all you folks. The police will need your cooperation. I’m going to give you a description of the girl and if you know her, know of her, or saw her anytime last night, speak right up. Is that clear?”

All eyes were on him, and a few of the crowd nodded eagerly.

"Is there a reward?" asked a short, round man who was protected against the weather by a long moth-eaten raccoon coat and fur cap with earflaps.

"Shame on you, Wiggins," hissed one of his neighbours.

"Lay off, Driscoll. You'd shat your own mother if there was a dollar to be got."

Mr. Driscoll scowled, but the crowd who heard the repartee laughed.

"Stop this at once," roared Wicken. "You're not at a music hall."

Murdoch continued. "If there's any reward it's the one of knowing you might be saving some poor mother hours of heartache from wondering where her child is. Now listen. The girl is about fifteen or sixteen years old, dark hair, blue eyes. A bit over five feet. Same height as Wiggins. She has a small mole to the side of her nose. Anyone know her?"

There was a murmur and buzz but nobody answered him.

"Well? Poor girl died in your laneway, you must know her."

Then Tinney offered, "There was a widow woman lived at the corner of Sackville and St. Luke's a few months back. Could be her."

At least four voices shouted him down.

"You're leaky, John Tinney," jeered his friend Driscoll. "That woman was on the downhill side of forty, for one thing, and she was as long as the copper, for another. Six foot if she was an inch. The sergeant says the poor girl was short."

Tinney shrugged. "You never know."

"When would she have passed on?" a woman asked Murdoch.

"Last night, probably between eleven and twelve o'clock." He pointed to Crabtree. "This officer is going to write down all of your names and addresses and any information you can give him. Honest information, mind. No queer or you'll

find yourself with a charge. If you prefer a bit of privacy you can come to the station. You all know where that is, don't you?"

There was a mixed response to that question. Some of them knew only too well.

He turned to Crabtree. "When you've done with this lot, stir up Cavendish, then trot over to the station just in case anybody's come asking. Join me as soon as you can. I'm going to start knocking on doors."

He went back down the laneway to where the body had been. Directly across from him was a row of six narrow, two-storey houses with sharp gables, each one leaning slightly towards its neighbour as if for comfort. All of the houses showed candles or lamps except for the end one, which was in darkness. Murdoch wondered if the inhabitants were sound sleepers. He decided to find out.

There was a ramshackle fence with more boards missing than standing. The gate had long gone and Murdoch stepped through the gap into the yard, taking careful notice of the tracks in the snow. From the back door, the snow was trampled down into a narrow path, unfortunately with so much overlay he couldn't make out anything distinctly. Maybe that was the top of a needle-toed boot, maybe not. He straightened up and turned his back to the house. The place where the girl had died was easily visible.

Suddenly an angry voice shouted.

"Oi. What you doing? Get out of here."

A woman was at the back door watching him. She was carrying a covered chamber pot that she was presumably about to empty into the outhouse.

"Detective Murdoch. I'd like to ask you some questions."

The courteous address wasn't really necessary, given the sort of woman she was. Her stained yellow wrapper was carelessly fastened and her unkempt hair straggled around a face that looked none too clean. She was young but her thin face was haggard.

"What sort of questions?" she said, not moving from the doorway.

"Tell you what, it's cold as Mercury out here. Why don't I come inside where we both would be more comfortable. And miss, if you can scrounge me up a mug of tea, I'd be right grateful."

"I haven't even lit the Gurney yet," she said, yawning widely and showing discoloured and chipped teeth. "I just got up, matter of fact."

"Lucky you. I've been up so long I'm ready for bed."

"That's not an invite, is it, Sergeant?"

Murdoch grinned, still willing to appease the woman, but he remained out of reach in case she decided to fling the contents of the pot in his direction. It wouldn't be the first time.

"What do you want to know?" she asked as she emptied the chamber beside the door, turning the snow yellow.

"Like I said, we'd both be more comfortable inside."

"Suit yourself."

She stepped back and Murdoch followed her into the gloomy hallway. Two closed doors were to the right and at the far end was a curtained archway through which came the dim glow of a candle. The air was cold and stale.

The woman deposited the chamber pot in her room.

"We're in here," she said and led the way through the portieres into the kitchen. Here a second woman was bending over a large black range, fanning at a meagre fire that she had started in its belly. She was trying to get it to blaze but succeeding only in wafting clouds of smoke into the room. She turned around, coughing, when they came in.

"Bleeding hell, Ettie, will you see to this shicey stove. It won't go." She saw Murdoch. "Who's he?"

"Copper. Wants to ask us some questions."

"What about?"

"Don't know, do I? Says he wants some tea." She went over to the stove and peered at the fire. "Sod it, Alice, I told

you to wait 'til it draws to put the coal on. You've smothered it."

Murdoch stepped forward. "Let me. I'm good with fires."

"That's a surprise. I thought frogs were good for nothing." Alice scowled. She too was in a day wrapper, this one a dingy green flannel. It gaped open at the neck, revealing her breasts, but she made no move towards modesty. She looked older than the young woman she had called Ettie by a good ten years.

There was a pair of tongs in a bucket beside the stove and Murdoch took them and removed the big lump of coal. Then he propped up the few bits of kindling and began to blow on the smouldering paper. A couple of good puffs and a bright flame appeared. When the wood began to crackle, he fished out some smaller pieces of coal from the bucket, put them on the fire and closed the stove door.

"Give it a few minutes," he said, dusting off his hands.

The two women had been watching him silently.

"I suppose he deserves his chatter broth after that," said Alice. She went to the sink and pumped water into a blackened pot. "It'll take a while. Stove isn't hot yet."

"You'd better sit down before you knock out the roof," said Ettie. The ceiling was low and Murdoch was six feet tall.

"Here." She pulled forward a wooden chair. The back slats were almost all gone and Murdoch didn't fancy the thing collapsing underneath him.

"I'll stand," he said, but he unbuttoned his coat and put his hat on the chair. Then he took his notebook and fountain pen from his inner pocket. The silver-nibbed pen had been Elizabeth's Christmas present to him before she died, and it was his pride and joy. Both women took stock.

"First off, I need to know your names."

"Why?" asked Ettie.

"Because, miss, the body of a female person has been found in the laneway. Practically in your back garden, as you might say."

He paused for their reaction, but there was none. No expression of any kind, except stillness. They reminded him of two cats who'd come into the yard of his lodging house last winter. Lean and tattered, with pale, wary eyes. When he'd tried to befriend the starving creatures, they had growled and spat at him and would have bitten his hand if they could.

Alice shrugged. "This weather'll kill you, that's for certain. Poor old dolly."

"Who do you mean, miss?"

"The stiff mort."

"I doubt she was a tramp, and she wasn't old. Possibly no more than fifteen or sixteen."

"Shame that."

They stared at him but he didn't say anything.

"What's it to do with us?" Ettie said finally.

"That's for you to tell." He paused. "We don't know who the girl is as yet. I'm making enquiries."

He wanted to see if either of them would offer information that they shouldn't have or try to mislead him in any way. Ettie spoke again.

"What kind of girl was she, then? A working girl, for instance, or a young lady?"

Alice guffawed. "Bleeding hell, Ettie. Young lady? What would a lady be doing in the lane?"

Ettie shrugged. "Takes all sorts," she said.

Murdoch knew this exchange was entirely for his benefit. He decided to play out the line a bit longer.

"We can't tell yet. She was mother naked."

Alice grimaced. "Couldn't have had much in her idea pot if she was stark in this weather."

She was overtaken by another fit of coughing, and she grabbed a cup from the table and spat into it. Dispassionately, she studied the sputum she had deposited.

"Just phlegm."

"What's your last name, Alice?" Murdoch asked.

"I'm Alice Black." She pointed at her partner. "She's Ettie Weston."

"Bernadette Weston," the other woman corrected her. "They just call me Ettie."

"Just come over did you?" he asked Alice.

She shrugged but the other woman laughed. "She's been here since she was a nipper but you'd never know it."

"And you?"

"I'm homegrown."

"Do you both live here?"

"Yes. We've got a snug down there." She pointed down the hall.

"You get use of the kitchen?"

Alice snorted. "Use! That's a joke, that is. We supply the rest of this shicey household, if you ask me. We have to fetch the coal scuttle into our room at night, else it'd be empty as a cripple's stomach by morning. Don't notice Mr. bloody Quinn bringing in a bit of coal, do you? But he's quick enough to come in here and warm his chilblains when we've got it up, isn't he?"

"Come on, Alice, he helps us out in other ways."

"You maybe, not me."

"Who is this Mr. Quinn?" Murdoch interceded.

"One of the other dudders that lives here. He's got the room next to us."

"Who else?"

Ettie answered. "There's two brothers upstairs. Say they're lumberjacks. Don't know what they're doing here if that's the case. Aren't going to cut down many trees in this neighbourhood, are they? And they're both lumpers. Bang around like horses up there."

She looked as if she was going to continue with a diatribe against the absent brothers but Murdoch stopped her.

"What's your occupation?"

Ettie grinned at him. In spite of her bad teeth she had an attractive face when she smiled. Youth still lingered there.

"I'm a glover. Alice the same."

"Where do you work?"

"Here. We work from home, don't we, Alice? We mend and clean."

"That's right. We specialize in men's articles. Of the best pigskin." She met his eyes impudently. "We fit them."

Murdoch knew that sexual protectors were made from fine pigskin, but he didn't take the bait. They were toying with him and the slightest sign of annoyance or embarrassment on his part would be seen as a victory they would chortle over for weeks to come.

"Who employs you?"

"Mr. Webster, the tailor. He's over on Queen Street."

"We're always in demand," added Alice. "The shops are using machines these days but we find most gentlemen still like the work done by hand, don't we, Ettie?" She laughed. "It's hard work, Sergeant. At the end of the day we're spent many times over."

"Alice, don't be vulgar. What'll the sergeant think?"

"I'm thinking I've had enough of you two. This is a serious matter I'm investigating."

In spite of his resolve, he'd got irritated.

Alice was still laughing. It became a coughing fit that shook her scrawny body so painfully Murdoch winced.

"Bad cough you've got there, Alice. Have you seen a doctor?"

She thumped herself on the chest. Her face had turned almost blue with the effort to get breath. "It's just a cold. Winter does it to you."

Murdoch went back to his notebook.

"Do either of you know anything about this young girl, then?" He went through the description again. "Fullish figure but short. Bit shorter than you, Ettie."

"Don't know her, do we, Alice?"

"No."

"Did you hear anything last night? Any cries? Shouts?"

They both shook their heads emphatically. "You were home all night?"

"Yes," said Alice. "Tucked up in bed, good as gold."

"No, Alice!" the younger girl spoke sharply. "He means earlier. You were at the hotel 'til almost ten." She stared her companion down.

"I will be checking," said Murdoch.

"See. Don't confuse him."

"Oh yeah. Sure I didn't know what you meant, Constable. I did spend the early part of the evening at the John O'Neil with friends. But I was here with Ettie the rest of the night. Didn't move."

"What about you, Ettie?"

"In bed at eight, I was. Not a peep 'til just half an hour ago."

"And nothing disturbed you?"

Ettie went to the stove and poked at the fire even though it was blazing merrily. She didn't turn around. "No, not a thing."

Alice giggled. "Come on now, Ettie. Don't give him the queer."

Ettie swivelled around, staring.

Alice continued. "Truth is, we was disturbed in the night. 'Bout two o'clock." She eyed Murdoch expectantly.

He sighed. "Get on with it, Alice. What woke you?"

"Terrible cries."

"Well? What was it?"

"Probably the Virgin Mary."

She laughed again so heartily at her own feeble joke, she went into another coughing spell. This produced another gob of sputum, which she tried to deposit in the cup and succeeded only in catching the edge.

He looked at her sharply. There was no possibility she could know his religious affiliation, but she was teasing about something.

"Would you please explain what -"

At that moment a loud yowling cry resounded down the dark hall. Pitiful moans and howls. Not quite human, though, as if some animal were in pain. Alice and Bernadette grinned at each other.

"Jesus save us," said Alice. "There it is again. Exact same cries as last night."

"Sounds like a dog," said Murdoch. "Must be hurt."

He went into the hall. The racket seemed to be coming from the far room.

"Who lives down there?" he called to the women.

They came to the archway, arms around each other.

"Samuel Quinn," said Alice.

"Does he own a dog?"

"He does. He's a regular dog fancier." She smiled but Murdoch didn't miss the quick warning poke from Ettie.

"I'll be right back," he said.

The noise stopped abruptly; then a soft plaintive howl filled the air, eerie, full of sorrow. He banged hard on the door.

"Open up. Police. Open up."

The piteous howling suddenly changed to the everyday identifiable barking of a dog. A lighter treble joined in, the yapping complementing the loud, deep warnings of the first dog. Murdoch kicked the door.

"I'm going to break down this door if you don't open it."

That did the trick. As fast as it might have taken the occupant to get out of bed, the door opened a crack. A young man stood there in his nightshirt. He was holding on to the collar of a small black and tan dog. It was hard to believe so loud a sound could come from an animal that size.

"Is something wrong with the dog?" Murdoch bellowed.

Before the man could answer, the animal gave a quick twist of its head and moved backwards, leaving the man holding an empty collar. In a flash, it slipped between his legs and darted off towards the kitchen.

“Princess, stop!” the man yelled. At that moment another dog, tiny and long-haired, appeared from behind him and scampered off in pursuit, yapping excitedly.

“Ettie, catch him!” the man shouted again.

At the kitchen threshold, the bitch halted and began to jump up and down, barking at top volume. The little one was right behind and reared himself up on his hind legs in an attempt to mount her. His erection was bright scarlet. The hound turned her head and snapped at him over her shoulder as indifferently as if he were a fly. Not daunted, he gripped her more tightly, a difficult task as she was easily twice as tall as he was. Ettie, with Alice peering over her shoulder, burst out laughing. The young man in the nightshirt pushed past Murdoch and ran down the hall. Quickly, he snatched the tiny dog up in his arms, where he wriggled wildly, trying to get back to his pleasure.

“Grab Princess.”

Ettie tried to oblige but it was easier said than done; the dog was dancing round her feet, barking non-stop. She shouted to make herself heard above the din. “Does she want a bit of meat, then?”

The dog stopped barking as if a switch had been thrown and sat down abruptly, her tongue out, tail wagging. Ettie smiled lovingly, her voice as tender as if she were addressing a beloved child. “Come on, my chick, I’ll see what I can find.”

She went over to the pine cupboard next to the sink.

The dog in Quinn’s arms was still yipping shrilly but Quinn smacked him smartly on the nose and he shut up, snuffling in surprise.

“Thank God for that,” said Alice. “What a din.”

Quinn became aware of Murdoch standing behind him and smiled disarmingly. “Sorry about all the noise.”

“Sounded like she was being tortured.”

“I know. It’s ’cause she has hound blood in her. Really she just wanted to get out and see if Ettie had any treats.”

Alice scowled at that. "Dog has a better life than I do," she said. "What a fuss."

Quinn was standing barefoot in the cold hall, dressed as he was, in his nightshirt, and he started to hop from one foot to the other.

"Didn't I hear you shout 'Police'?" he asked Murdoch.

"He's a detective. Mr. Mud something. He wants to ask you some questions," said Alice. "Hope your pot's clean." Her glance at Quinn was full of malice.

"Oh? What about?" Quinn looked decidedly uneasy.

"Let's go to your room, and I can speak to you there," said Murdoch. He was keen to regain some control of the situation.

Ettie came back from the kitchen, Princess behind her.

"Is that all you want from us?"

"For now. But Quinn here will catch his death if he doesn't get some clothes on."

The little dog was struggling wildly to get free, and suddenly Quinn thrust him into Murdoch's arms.

"Carry him, will you? Hold him tight."

Murdoch had no choice but to obey. It was a small dog but it must have weighed a good ten pounds, most of the flesh in its portly belly. The dog's long, silky coat was caramel-coloured and smelled like violets, as if he'd recently been bathed with perfumed soap. He had a squashed-in face, long ears and bulging eyes that were nonetheless bright with intelligence. Or lust. His major aim at the moment seemed to be to get back to the bitch. Quinn caught Princess by the scruff of the neck and half dragged, half pushed her down the hall to his room. He stepped back to usher in Murdoch.

"My humble abode, as they say."

The room was stiflingly hot, and the warm air poured out into the chill of the hall. A fire was blazing in the hearth and a candle was lit. There was one tall, narrow window currently hung with a piece of torn cloth that might have

once graced a table. No fresh air had entered via the window since the house was constructed but Murdoch didn't expect anything else. Fresh air was a prerogative of the wealthy, who in the winter could afford coal to heat cold rooms and in the summer employed servants to deal with the dust that sifted through every aperture.

Quinn pulled forward a wooden box that had formerly contained lye and placed a red plush cushion on top of it.

"Sit yourself down," he said and plucked the dog out of Murdoch's arms. Ignoring the beast's protests, he thrust him into an old hat box that was beside the bed. Airholes were punched into the sides and Murdoch could see a keen brown eye as the dog stared out at them. The bitch collapsed with a sigh and a smacking of lips and promptly closed her eyes.

"What's his name?" asked Murdoch, indicating the yapper.

Quinn looked bewildered. "Name? I, er, oh sure, Prince - his name is Prince" He grinned. "Looks a bit like him, doesn't he? Pop eyes, fat stomach."

"He certainly has the same appreciation for females," said Murdoch. "Looks like a quality dog. Where'd you get him?"

"Actually, he's not my dog. Belongs to a pal of mine. I'm taking care of him for a few days."

"That's kind of you."

"Eh?"

"It must be a lot of trouble."

"Not really. Good little dog, aren't you, Bertie?"

"Thought you said his name was Prince?"

"What? Yeah. It is. Prince Albert. Got bloodlines, this animal."

He had perched on the edge of his bed but he jumped up nervously and went over to the fire, where an iron kettle was hissing away on a spit. "I was going to make myself a pot of char. Can I offer you a mug?"

"Thanks, that would be appreciated."

Quinn reached under the bed and pulled out another box. This one was cardboard and advertised gloves. He took out

a tin of tea, a brown, chipped china pot and two mugs, placing them on a japanned table next to Murdoch where there was a silvered milk jug and sugar basin.

“What can I help you with, Officer?”

“I’ll wait for the tea, then we can get down to it.”

“Be ready in a jiffy.”

Quinn spooned the black tea leaves from the tin into the pot, filled it with boiling water from the kettle and covered it with a blue, knitted cozy. His movements were the deft, practiced habits of a bachelor. He was a short, stocky man, rather bandy-legged. His complexion was swarthy and badly pockmarked but there was something open and humorous in his expression. Murdoch couldn’t help but take a liking to him.

“Could you go for a bun with your tea? I’m a baker. They let me have the leftovers.”

“Don’t mind if I do.”

Murdoch could feel a trickle of sweat down the back of his neck. With the two of them in the tiny room and the fire roaring like that, it was becoming unbearably hot.

“Here, give me your coat,” said Quinn. He took the seal coat and laid it across the bed. An old army blanket, heavy and greasy looking, seemed to make do as a cover. Murdoch hoped the coat wasn’t going to collect any livestock.

Quinn pulled forward the single chair in the room, removed the pair of trousers that was draped across the back and sat down. He had produced a biscuit tin from the window shelf and he opened it, revealing two currant buns and one half-eaten slice of bread. Princess opened her eyes and raised her head, recognising the possibility of food. Murdoch took one of the buns and bit into it. His teeth made no impression. Quinn grinned.

“Better dip it into your char to soften it up a bit. Here.”

He poured some tea, thick and black, into one of the mugs, added two spoonsful of sugar and a splash of milk and offered it to Murdoch. Princess sat up on her hind legs

and begged. She let out one demanding yelp. Quinn broke off a piece of his bun and gave it to her. Murdoch followed suit.

"Alice called her the Virgin Mary," he said.

Quinn grinned nervously. "Did she now?"

Murdoch sipped at the hot tea, almost burning his tongue. Quinn drank some of his, not looking at him. Murdoch gave the end of his bun to Princess.

"All right, to business, then."

He told Quinn about the dead girl.

The man put down his cup. "Why, that's terrible, that is. Just terrible. Young, you say?"

"No more than sixteen."

The candle and the fire cast so many shadows it was hard to read his expression completely, but as far as Murdoch could tell, Quinn was genuinely shocked.

"How did she die?"

"We don't know 'til we get the postmortem examination."

Quinn shook his head in disbelief.

"I'm trying to find out if anybody heard or saw anything last night. Between ten and midnight particularly."

"I wasn't here, myself. Like I said, I'm a baker. I have to work from ten-thirty to seven. I've not long got home, as a matter of fact." He indicated his nightshirt. "I sleep during the day."

"Do you usually leave by the back door?"

"Eh? Oh, er, no. By the front. To Wilton Street. She was in the laneway, you say? I wouldn't have seen her at all."

"Don't you have to relieve the dogs before you go to work?"

"Yes, that's right. I did that. Yes, I did take them out but it was earlier. Weren't no dead body there then, I promise you."

Murdoch made a note. "Can you be precise as to the time?"

“Yes, I can. I was thinking I’d better start getting ready for work. Looked at the clock. Ten minutes before ten. ‘Come on, Princess,’ I says, ‘let’s go for a bit of a stroll.’ So we did. Didn’t see nothing, like I said.” Suddenly he slapped his thigh. “No, what am I thinking? I saw Alice coming home.” He winked and tapped the side of his nose. “As she would put it, she was hickey as a lambskin.”

Murdoch wrote that down. It confirmed the time Alice had given.

“Where do you work, Mr. Quinn?”

“The Union Hotel on King Street. I do all their dinner rolls for them. And the pies and tarts. Very tasty, if I say so myself. You can’t tell from that one, it’s a bit stale. Drop by for breakfast one of these days. I’ll serve you a Bath bun like you’ve never had. Melt in your mouth.”

“Thanks, I might do that.” Murdoch wiped at his sweaty face. “I’d better get going. I’ve got to talk to a lot of people.”

“Wonder what the poor girl was doing in the laneway at that time of night. Not to mention it was colder than Beelzebub’s bottom. Was she a, er, lady of the night?”

“I don’t think so. Course it’s hard to tell with no clothes. She was naked.”

“Sweet Jesus, you don’t say. How did that happen?”

“They were stolen, most likely. Which is a serious offence in the eye of the law.” He put away his notebook and stood up. “By the way, didn’t you take Prince Albert out last night?”

“What?”

“You know, to relieve himself. He must have needed to go as well. You just mentioned taking out Princess.”

“Oh, no ... Fact is I just got him this morning. From me pal.”

“He must be quite a swell to own such a nobby dog. Bloodlines and all that.”

Quinn tugged at his sidewhiskers. "Oh, no. This dog ain't worth a dime. Who'd pay money for a funny-looking tiddler like him?" He drummed his fingers on the arm of his chair. "Fact is, the fellow, this pal of mine, is going on his honeymoon. Didn't want to leave the little fellow with his mother 'cause she doesn't see so good. What the heck! I felt sorry for the man. And I do like dogs, as you can probably tell. Said I'd take care of him 'til he got back."

The words had come tumbling out and now he stopped, eyeing Murdoch. His full cheeks glistened in the firelight.

Murdoch went to the door.

"If anything else comes to you, drop in at the station and give us a report. Do you know where we are?"

"Sure. The corner of Parliament and Wilton."

"That's it."

"I will. For certain I will. Terrible pity." Quinn ran his fingers through his already dishevelled dark hair. "Best of luck."

Murdoch stepped out into the hall, which seemed wondrously refreshing after the furnace of Quinn's room. He headed back toward the kitchen. The man might be a likeable fellow, but his guilty conscience was as thick in the air as the smell of the dogs.

Chapter Three

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 10

DONALDA RHODES WOKE ABRUPTLY , forcing herself into consciousness away from the terror of her dream. It is the same nightmare over and over. She is walking by the river that flowed at the bottom of the field where she grew up. She is accompanied by another woman. Usually this woman is her dear friend Marianne, but this time it is Harriet Shepcote. Owen, a child still in skirts, is skipping ahead of them. Suddenly he falls and disappears. She runs over and sees that he has tumbled down an old well. She can see him at the bottom, hear him crying. She struggles to reach him but cannot. "Help me, Harriet," she cries, but the young woman only stands frozen in fear. As Donalda looks into the dark mouth of the well she sees that it is no longer her son crouched there but a little girl with long dark hair. She is sobbing and her anguish enters Donalda's own body.

She pulled herself into a sitting position. What time was it? Her bedroom was dark, the curtains drawn and the fire gone to a few dull embers in the grate. She fumbled on the bedside table for the box of matches, struck one and lit the lamp. She felt almost ashamed. She was behaving like a frightened child in the nursery.

She got out of bed and put on her velvet wrapper and slippers. The mantel clock said a quarter past nine. She went over to the window and pulled back the curtains. Outside, the street was empty, the bare maples charcoal etchings against the grey sky. Fine snow danced by the window. She leaned her forehead against the cold pane and her breath made a patch of mist in front of her.

There was a discreet tapping at the door and Edith Foy entered, manoeuvring the breakfast tea trolley.

"Good morning, Mrs. Rhodes."

"Good morning."

Edith wheeled the trolley to the fireplace, where there was a bowlegged Chinese table and a plush-covered armchair.

"I hope you slept well, madam."

"Yes, thank you."

"Shall I build up the fire?"

"If you please."

Donalda poured herself a cup of tea from the silver pot and added a slice of lemon and a piece of sugar. There was a bread roll and a dish of stewed compote on the tray for her breakfast.

"Is Master Owen awake?"

"Not as yet, madam. Shall I have Foy call him?"

"No, I'll do it. But you can start drawing his bath."

She sipped at her tea, enjoying the warmth of the cup in her hands. "Where is Theresa? Is she still unwell?"

The housekeeper was poking at the fire, her back to Donalda.

"To tell the truth, madam, I don't rightly know."

She turned around and there was a strange expression on her face, a hint of pleasure curling at the side of her mouth.

"She's gone."

Donalda stared at her. "I don't understand. To church, you mean?"

"No, madam." Edith took a piece of paper out of her apron pocket. "I went to her room first thing, seeing as she had not yet shown her face in the kitchen and I was concerned she might still be feeling poorly." She handed Donalda the note. "This was on her bed."

Donalda unfolded it. The message was written in pencil in childish big letters.

I HAVE GONE BACK HOME. I MISS EVERYBODY TO MUCH. YOUR OBEDIENT SERVANT , Therese Laporte.

“Good gracious. What does it mean?”

“Just what it says, I think, madam. She’s gone off back to Chatham, most like.”

“But why?”

“Like she says there. She was homesick.”

“I know she was at first, but not lately. She seemed to have settled down nicely.”

“Not really, madam. She put on a good face with you because she knew that it bothered you to see her carrying on so, but I heard her weeping away nights.”

“You should have told me.”

“I didn’t want to trouble you with such silly matters, madam. I kept expecting she’d get over it.”

“When did she leave?”

“I can’t rightly say. I was concerned about her last night and looked in, as was only right. The room was dark and I thought she was sleeping and didn’t disturb her. However, this morning I found that she’d put a bolster under the quilt to make it look like she was in bed. She didn’t want her getaway to be discovered too soon. Cunning child that she is. Not giving a care to those who would worry about her.”

“I find it so hard to believe that she wouldn’t say anything.”

“Ungrateful, if you ask me. She should have given notice at least. And you taking her under your wing the way you did, madam.”

Donalda wanted to snap at her housekeeper, speak out in the girl’s defence, but she knew that would be foolish. There was bad feeling enough. Donalda had taken to Therese from the start. She was sweet-tempered and eager to please, whereas Mrs. Foy, efficient though she was, often had an aggrieved put-upon sort of air that was unpleasant.

The housekeeper came over to the tea trolley and, unasked, poured more tea into Donalda's cup.

"I haven't wanted to say anything, madam, because I know you showed a fondness to the girl, but she was a sly one ..."

"Why do you say that?"

"She looked like butter wouldn't melt in her mouth, but -"

"Yes, do go on." Donalda couldn't hide her irritation.

Edith tightened her lips. "Little Miss Laporte was a thief."

"I don't believe that!"

"It is quite true, madam. Last Thursday my silver brooch went missing from my room, and also my husband's watch fob. A real gold piece it is, that he's most fond of. I found them in the girl's room. Tucked into the back of the wardrobe."

"How do you know they were stolen?"

"Begging your pardon, madam, I don't see as how they could have walked there."

"Why would anyone steal jewellery only to leave it behind?"

"I can't pretend to understand the mind of a thief, madam. I only tell you what I found ... There was another thing, madam."

Edith sounded as if she had something delicious in her mouth. Donalda was positive she actually smacked her lips.

"I found a box of handkerchiefs in her drawer. Untouched. I distinctly remember they were the ones Dr. Rhodes himself gave you yourself as a Christmas present. Lovely Irish linen they are. If that isn't proof I don't know what is."

"Nonsense. I gave them to Theresa myself."

"Oh, I see. I beg your pardon, madam, I didn't realize -"

"I didn't much care for them."

"Of course, madam. You can do whatever you wish with your own belongings."

"Thank you, Edith, I shall keep that in mind."

"Yes, madam. Will there be anything else?"

"I assume you plan to inform the police about the thefts."

Edith lowered her eyes quickly. "I don't wish to be uncharitable. I have them back and as long as there's nothing else missing I am willing to let the matter drop."

"In that case we had better question the doctor and Mr. Owen. Neither has reported any loss so far, but perhaps they should check their cufflinks and pins."

"Yes, madam. Will you be wanting me to advertise again?"

"I suppose so."

"Perhaps this time we could request an orphan girl? They appreciate a good position more than most young women do these days. The Wrights got someone from the Barnardo Home in Peterborough and she has worked out most satisfactorily."

"Very well."

"I'll see to it tomorrow." Edith picked up the note from the tea trolley. "We don't need this, do we?" Before Donalda could protest, she threw it into the fire. The flames devoured it in a moment.

"What dress would you wish me to lay out this morning, madam?"

Donalda was staring at the black fragments of paper as they floated up the chimney. "What did you say?"

"Your dress, madam? Which one today?"

"My wool plaid, I think. The church is never warm enough."

"Perhaps your cashmere undervest, then, madam?"

Edith went into the adjacent dressing room. Donalda was glad to be out of her sight. She could feel tears stinging at the back of her eyes. Inappropriate tears, she knew, but the anguish of her dream was still close and she was hurt by Theresa's callous behaviour. In spite of the inequality between them she thought there had been real affection. She was obviously wrong.

When Edith returned to the kitchen with the breakfast tray, her husband was sitting at the table with Joe, the stable lad. The boy was gulping down hot porridge and John Foy was sipping noisily from a mug of steaming tea.

“‘Bout time you stuck your head out of the den,” she said.

Foy spooned more sugar into the mug, took another drink, smacked his lips and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

“I said it was about time you got down here,” she repeated.

“I heard you,” grunted Foy.

“It’s almost a quarter to ten. Master Owen needs his bath drawn and you should get the doctor’s breakfast going.”

Foy sipped his tea slowly. His wife glared. “What’s wrong with you? You look like something the cat brought in.”

“Don’t go at me, woman. I was up late last night.”

“Oh?”

“Oh, yourself. What do you know? You were whistling at the angels.”

“Why were you up late, then, Mr. Clever?”

“Because the doctor couldn’t get in.”

“What do you mean he couldn’t get in?”

Her husband was spinning out his tale, knowing it would irritate her to no end if he was privy to something she wasn’t.

“The door was bolted. Fortunately for him, I was awake.”

“What time was that?”

“Must have been at least two o’clock.”

“Where was he ’til that godforsaken hour in the morning?”

“At his consulting rooms. He enjoys it there. It’s quiet and peaceful.”

“How do you know?”

“How do you think? Because the doctor speaks English and I understand English. He told me.”

“Who bolted the door?”

"Must have been Mr. Owen. He took Miss Shepcote home. Poor thing was very poorly, sneezing all over the china the entire evening. I suppose when he come back he shot the bolt, not knowing Doctor was out."

Edith took a pair of gloves out of her pocket and wriggled her fingers into them. They were a tight fit.

"Where'd you get those?" asked Foy.

"I found them."

"Where?"

"It don't matter where." She smoothed the black leather gloves. "What were you doing going round the house at two o'clock in the morning?"

"I couldn't sleep. Not with the racket you were making. So I got up. Thought I might as well make sure everything was tidy downstairs. Good thing I did too. The doctor had been out there knocking the wood off the door. Could have got his death of cold."

She spoke sharply. "I hope you're watching yourself, John Foy. This is a good position for us."

Neither of them had acknowledged the presence of Joe Seaton, who had not raised his eyes from his bowl of porridge. He finished, picked up his dish and went over to the sink. Edith noticed him.

"See you give it a good rinse."

He didn't say anything. He never did, and they had got into the habit of treating him as if he were deaf and dumb, which he wasn't.

"You'd better go and get the carriage ready," continued Edith. "They'll be leaving soon. I don't know what's the matter with you stableboys. You couldn't find your way out of a maze if a string was tied to your whatnot."

Joe's predecessor had left the Rhodeses' employ the summer before without any warning. Although Joe had never clapped eyes on the boy, Edith always spoke as if they were in a wilful collusion.

She tapped her husband on the shoulder. "As for you, if you don't hurry up with that bath, they'll all miss church. And we wouldn't like that to happen, would we?"

"I haven't finished my tea yet. Where's Tess? She can do it."

Edith stroked the sleek kid of her gloves, finger by finger.

Foy watched her over the edge of his mug of tea. "Is she still poorly?"

"She's gone. She's left."

"Gone? What the Jesus do you mean?"

"What I say, and I'll thank you not to take the Lord's name in vain ... She was homesick. Couldn't stand it here a minute longer. She's gone home."

"Home?"

"There's an echo in here."

"To Chatham, you mean."

"That's where she's from, so I assume that is where she is heading."

"Will you please explain what the Christ you are going on about? How d'you know she's gone home?"

Edith reached over and put her hand on top of her husband's. There was no affection in the touch. "I told the mistress that the girl ran away because she was homesick. I told her she left a letter. She left it on her bed. For me to find. Said she missed her home. You know how she was always going on about that sister of hers ..."

Joe made a strange grunting noise, and the Foys stared at him.

"What's wrong, lost your sweetheart?" asked John maliciously.

"Leave him alone."

"It's true. I seen him making sheep's eyes at her."

"Never mind that. Listen to me. I also told the mistress that Therese stole some of our jewellery."

"She didn't do that."

“Oh yes, she did. You see I found your fob in her bedroom.”

“Oh, get away ...”

She gripped his hand hard. “That gold bit went missing weeks ago. You said you’d dropped it at the lodge. But there it was. How would it have ended up in the girl’s room if she didn’t steal it?”

He stared at her, then jerked his hand out from beneath her gloved one. “You’ve got all the answers, haven’t you?”

She began to peel off the tight black gloves. “One of us has to, don’t we ... Now, why don’t you get along and draw that bath. You, Joe, swill out your bowl and get going. You’d think the royal princess had vanished, to see the both of you.”

Joe pumped out some water and washed his bowl and spoon. If the other two had paid him any attention at all they might have noticed how slumped over he was. They might have seen that his thin, pale face was taut with misery.

Joe already knew that Therese had gone.

Chapter Four

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 10

AT SIX O'CLOCK MURDOCH SENT CRABTREE to bring Cavendish to the morgue so he could do a likeness of the dead girl. He and two constables had called at all the houses on the nearby streets with no success. There were the usual number of unlikely identifications but nothing he could believe. Nobody had come in to number four with information, and telegrams to the other stations had so far yielded nothing. When Murdoch finally left for home the brief grey winter day was long gone. The street lamps were lit and the persistent snow swirled around the posts, shining in the gas light. His lodgings were on Ontario Street, an easy walking distance from the station. He was tired and hungry and glad not to have far to go.

Three years ago Father Fair, the priest at St. Paul's, had referred him to the Kitchens, who were also Roman Catholic. His previous digs had been with a Presbyterian widow whose faith was as hard and uncompromising as the Rock on which she claimed her church was built. It was a relief to Murdoch to live with his fellow parishioners. There was no frown of disapproval when he left for Mass. No muttered prayer of fear when he hung his crucifix above his bed. And he didn't have to find ways to dispose of the roast beef his previous landlady had always served on Fridays.

The Kitchen house was one-half of a double with white bargeboards edging the brown gables. In the summertime both dwellings were covered with grape-ivy, but now the runners were like tracings on the orange brick. He let himself in.

The hallway was redolent with the smell of fried meat, and a burst of saliva filled his mouth. On Sunday all restaurants and shops were closed and the only food he'd eaten all day was half a cheese sandwich that the duty sergeant had shared with him. His stomach rumbled. He was looking forward to his tea.

The far door opened and Beatrice Kitchen came out to greet him. She was a tiny woman, as neat as a nuthatch, with fine grey hair worn flat and smooth to her head.

"Mr. Murdoch, you're so late. You must be famished. I'll wager you didn't have a thing to eat all day."

"You are absolutely right on all counts."

She took his hat and coat and hung them on the coat tree. "You've been dealing with that poor murdered girl, I'm sure," she was tut-tutting as she dusted the snow from his hat and coat.

"You heard about it, then?"

"Yes, I did. May Brogan - you've heard me mention her, I'm sure; she was so poorly all winter - well, in any case she came to Mass late and she was all of a fluster, I could see that right away. After the service she told me about the police finding a dead girl in St. Luke's Lane. May lives at the corner of St. Luke's and Sumach, so she heard all the commotion. She wondered if I knew anything, seeing as how you live here, but I said I was in the dark myself. A constable had come to fetch you early this morning, but that was all I could say."

Murdoch hovered awkwardly in the narrow hall, pinned by his landlady's excitement.

"Not that I would tell May anything that I shouldn't, as you know. Oh, dear, look at you shivering here. All in good time ... Come on down to the kitchen and get yourself warm. I made you a nice bit of liver."

Murdoch rubbed his hands together to restore the circulation. "Thank you, Mrs. K. Right now I could eat moss

off a rock.” He nodded in the direction of the parlour. “How’s himself?”

“Not so good today. But he’ll cheer up when he knows you’re home. He was very interested in the story of the dead girl. He’s got all sorts of ideas already. You know what he’s like.”

“I’ll be glad to hear them. We’ve got nowhere so far.”

Murdoch meant what he said. He’d come to value Arthur Kitchen’s shrewdness, and talking over the incidents of his day had become a routine they both looked forward to.

Last winter Arthur Kitchen had developed a hacking cough, and it soon became apparent he had the consumption. Until then he’d had a good job as a railway clerk, but when his condition was known, he was fired with some paltry excuse. A tiny pension from an insurance company was all he had to live on. Over the last six months his health had deteriorated to the point where he no longer left the house, spending his time confined to the small front parlour. Murdoch was the only lodger now; others had moved out when they realized what the sickness was.

Murdoch followed his landlady to the kitchen and as they passed the parlour, he could hear the bubbling cough.

“I’ll just say hello,” he said. With a knock, he opened the parlour door.

The room was icy cold. Mrs. Kitchen had heard that fresh air was good for tubercular patients, and she kept the window open day and night. Murdoch wasn’t convinced the sooty blasts that came in from the Toronto streets were equivalent to fresh Muskoka breezes, but Arthur found the cold air relieved the discomfort of his constant fever. When he saw who it was, his gaunt face lit up.

“Evening, Bill. Late tonight.”

He was seated in a wicker Bath chair, wrapped in a quilt. Handy beside him was a spittoon. The room was thick with the rotten odour of consumptive lungs.

“Evening yourself, Arthur. You’ve heard about the case, I understand –”

Beatrice interrupted. “That’ll keep ‘til you’ve had your tea. Come on now.”

Murdoch grinned. “All right. Be back shortly.”

He followed her down to the kitchen, which was blessedly warm and filled with the delicious smell of fried onions. A place was set at the small pine table and he sat down obediently while Beatrice took his plate out of the warming oven. The Kitchens and he had become good friends but he was still the boarder and, as such, certain formalities were observed. He was served separately from the two of them and always got the best cuts of meat and the choicest vegetables. He’d given up protesting. Arthur seemed to subsist on broth and junkets but Murdoch worried that Beatrice didn’t eat enough herself. Even birds couldn’t subsist on air.

“The water’s boiling when you want it and there’s a lemon pudding for your sweet. Join us when you’re done.”

She left him to eat alone.

He eased his chilled feet out of his boots into the slippers she had warmed for him and tackled his meal. The liver had dried out to the consistency of guttapercha but he was too hungry to be fussy. He sliced off a piece, loaded onions on top of it and shovelled it into his mouth. He demolished the meal in no time at all, then sawed off a thick hunk of bread from the loaf beside his plate and mopped up the grease from his dish. The kettle was whistling shrilly and he got up to make a pot of tea. The sweet was lumpy but he wolfed that down too, then sat back to drink his tea. Usually he read the newspapers while he ate but there were none today. Instead he propped up the book he’d taken out of the library the week before. It was a biography of the explorer Henry Stanley.

He turned the page but realized he hadn’t really taken in the words. He was finding it hard to concentrate. Images of

a young naked body kept intruding. Images of raw flesh where the skin had torn from the knees and elbows as they pulled her from the winter's deadly embrace.

The three of them were seated in the parlour. The window was closed and Beatrice had lit the fire but it hadn't yet touched the chill air. Arthur, the lines on his face as dark as scars, was wearing a woollen nightcap and mittens, and Murdoch was huddled under a blanket. The single oil lamp hardly made a dint on the gloom. For the past hour, they had been discussing the day. Murdoch had no worries about them being indiscreet. Arthur didn't go out and although Beatrice enjoyed hearing gossip, it was from an avid interest in humanity, not to revel in another's misfortune. He knew she had never repeated any information that she'd gleaned from their chats together. He also knew that her friends and neighbours often pressed her to be forthcoming but she wouldn't.

"What's your next step, then?" asked Beatrice.

"Wait and see, really. Cavendish did a good likeness and I sent the drawings over to all the newspapers. The *Herald* and the *News* should be able to print it in the morning editions. If we're lucky we'll get a response soon."

"What's himself have to say about it?"

"He hasn't had a chance to say anything yet. He wasn't in. Bad stomach again."

Thomas Brackenreid was the inspector of Murdoch's division, and there was no love lost between them. Many an evening Murdoch had poured out his anger and frustration to his sympathetic friends.

Mrs. Kitchen moved her worktable closer to the lamp and spread out a box of shells on the surface. She picked up a small wooden box and arranged the shells on the lid. She added to their tiny income by making craft items and selling them to the fancy goods stores on King Street.

"What do you think?" she asked the two men.

"Very artistic," said Murdoch.

"The scallop would look better in the centre," said Arthur.

"I think you're right." She dipped the brush into the glue pot.

"Best thing is if you find her clothes," said Arthur.

"Might be best but he doesn't know what to look for, does he?" his wife said.

"You're right there, Mother. I wasn't thinking."

He coughed violently, then spat into the spittoon. There was a fleck of blood on his lower lip and his wife reached over and wiped it away as calmly as if he were a child with a crumb on his face.

"Well, whoever or whatever she was, I'm sorry for her," Beatrice continued. "So young. Somebody somewhere will be worrying."

She added a brown auger shell to the rim of the box.

"Not necessarily at this moment, Mother," said Arthur. "She could have come from the country. Her family might not be expecting to hear from her for a month or more."

"You could be right, Father. God rest her soul," said Beatrice, and she blessed herself.

"Amen to that," said Murdoch, and he did likewise. There was silence in the room except for the soft hiss of the coals burning and the quiet tick of the mantel clock. Murdoch glanced over at Arthur, who was staring into the fire.

"I almost forgot. There was something I wanted to ask you. What kind of dog is about this big?" He indicated with his hands. "Long-haired. Caramel-coloured with pop eyes and a squashed-in nose. Long ears."

Before he got sick, Kitchen had been quite a dog fancier. He considered for a minute. "Sounds like a Pekinese. Wouldn't you say, Mother?"

Beatrice nodded. "That or a King Charles."

"Not that colour. Why'd you ask, Bill?"

"Just curious."

He related the story of Samuel Quinn and the Virgin Mary, although from delicacy he called her the proper name of Princess. Mrs. K. tutted and exclaimed several well-I-nevers, but they both were diverted by the tale.

"I miss having a dog," said Mrs. K. "And Arthur's always wanted a greyhound, haven't you, dear? As soon as he's better we'll get one."

Arthur nodded, the pretense hovering in the air like a miasma.

Murdoch yawned. Time for bed. "Do you want more coal on?" he asked.

"If you please. I must finish this box, and Arthur has promised to read to me."

Arthur grunted. "She says she wants to hear *Paradise Lost*. I told her it was written by a Protestant and she won't understand a word, but she insists."

"You can explain what is necessary. You like doing that."

Murdoch smiled and started to load lumps of the black shiny coal into the red maw of the fire. The supply was low in the bucket and he made a note to himself to have some delivered for them. Then he shook hands good night and left.

Beatrice had put a candle ready for him on the hall table, and he lit it from the sconce and went upstairs.

Last summer, Murdoch had insisted on renting the extra room upstairs for a sitting room. It was a squeeze for him to manage on his wages but it helped out the Kitchens and he liked having the luxury of a separate place where he could sit and read if he wanted to. He went into that room first.

It was simply furnished with a flowered velvet armchair and matching footstool, a sideboard and two lamp tables. The oilcloth-covered floor was softened with a woven rag rug courtesy of Mrs. Kitchen.

He placed his candlestick on the sideboard, then bent down and rolled the rug back to the wall. Even though it was getting late he had to do his practice before he went to bed.

Two years ago last June, his fiancée, Elizabeth Milner, had contracted typhoid. Within five days she was dead, gone as quickly as a shadow on the lawn. He mourned silently, deeply. Still did. But he was a healthy, vigorous man and of late his body had begun to clamour for normal satisfaction. Many a night he tossed restlessly, listening to the church bell mark out each hour until the dawn seeped over the sleeping city, blotting up the darkness, and he sought a relief that not even the threat of confession could stop.

Shortly before Christmas he decided he had to make some attempt at renewing a social life and enrolled in a dance class given by a Professor Mansfield Otranto. The professor was evasive about his educational credentials but, as he taught dancing and did phrenology consultations, Murdoch didn't think it much mattered if his mastery of Greek and Latin was shaky and his accent slithered all over the place before coming to rest in the flat vowels of Liverpool. They'd had three waltz lessons so far. After five lessons Murdoch would be allowed to attend the soiree that the professor gave for his best pupils on the second Saturday in the month.

He took his patent-leather dance slippers out of the shoebox and slipped them on. Ready? Arms up to shoulder height, right hand resting lightly on the lady's back.

"Mr. Murdoch, pul-leez! Don't push. You're not trying to get a cow into a barn. Ladies are like thoroughbreds. Skittish and sensitive. You must *persuade*. And again! Pul-leez, sir, don't stomp. A person would think you were killing cockroaches. Glide, always glide. Like skating ... And with the right ... Forward, two, three. Left again, two, three ..."

The professor's wife, a plump, well-coiffed woman, thumped out the waltz with military precision on the out-of-tune piano tucked into the corner of the third-floor studio. Otranto took the female part, surprisingly graceful for such a corpulent man. He was short, and the overpowering smell of his violet pomade wafted upwards beneath Murdoch's nose. The oil,

however, could not disguise the sparsity of the hair plastered across his crown, nor could the sweet cachou he sucked on mask his cigar-tainted breath.

In spite of this, Murdoch was enjoying the lessons immensely and was looking forward to holding an honest-to-goodness woman in his arms.

Humming some bars from Strauss, he began to dance around his tiny room.

“Glide! One, two, three. Forward, two, three. Lightly, lightly, like it’s air you’re treading on. Think of clouds, light fluffy clouds ...”

He did this for twenty minutes more, then executed a tricky half-turn and, pleased with his progress, decided to call it a night.

Chapter Five

He recognized the portrait immediately, although in it, Therese looked older and of course the artist could not capture the glow of rude health on the lightly freckled cheek that made her so attractive. Fear shot through his body. Had anybody seen him? Could he be linked to the dead girl? He lowered the newspaper, struggling to gain control. Guilt came like acid in his stomach, but it was really the fear that gripped him. If there was one jot of sorrow for the young interrupted life, it was so fleeting he could not have acknowledged it.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY II

LIKE ALL THE OTHER POLICE OFFICERS , Murdoch spent long hours at the station. When he entered the station hall early the next morning and caught the usual whiff of sawdust, coal stove and winter clothes, it was as familiar as home.

“Good morning, Sergeant,” Murdoch greeted the duty sergeant, who was perched on a tall stool behind the high counter. The other man’s dour face changed and he grinned at Murdoch.

“Would you believe I rode on the Singer this morning?”

“No! You must have wheeled it all the way.”

“I did not. I told you, it’ll go through anything.”

Variations of this conversation had been happening all winter. Because the detective branch of the police force was so new, the status of detectives, especially acting detectives like Murdoch, was unclear. Technically he ranked above all the other officers but below the two sergeants and the inspector. As the only detective he often felt isolated. Then last summer, by chance, he and Sergeant Seymour had started to chat about the merits of the Singer versus

the Ideal bicycle. It turned out that Seymour was also a keen cyclist and on that basis the two men had struck up a friendship. The rivalry wasn't serious and they had gone on a couple of strenuous bicycling trips when their days off coincided.

"Anything for me?" Murdoch asked.

"Foster sent over a photograph. I put it on your desk."

He nodded in the direction of the three ragged men who were sitting on the bench. They were all watching the two officers.

"They're here about the girl." Suddenly, the sergeant raised his voice. "Hey you! Yes, you in the tartan cap. I told you no spitting on the floor. Do it again and you'll be charged."

The man addressed scuffed his boot into the sawdust on the floor like a scolded schoolboy. The other two shifted their stare into the space ahead of them.

"Let me get a cup of tea and look at the photograph and then I'll talk to them," said Murdoch. He pushed through the gate and walked back to the orderly room.

The station was not large. On the first floor was the public hall, lit by narrow grimy windows. Most months of the year, the wall sconces had to be lighted and the room was stifling winter and summer. A large black stove dominated the centre, and around the walls ran a wooden bench, rubbed smooth by the rear ends of countless nervous occupants. Across one end of the room ran a high wooden counter, a barrier between police and public. Behind it sat the duty sergeant with his big cloth-bound daily register, and behind him was a desk with a telephone and the telegraph machine, manned this morning by a young constable named Graham. At the rear were two small holding cells for those brought in as drunk and disorderly. Some nights these also had to make do as a place for waifs and strays, as part of the duty of the police force was to give temporary shelter to the homeless. Last year number-four station had handled

over a hundred and twenty souls, most of them single men who weren't vagrants – not yet, anyway – but had no home to go to.

The backroom where the policemen ate or on occasion questioned suspects was also dark, but there was a cheery fire going in the hearth and, as usual, a kettle of water boiling on the hob. Murdoch poured some hot water into a large teapot. The tea grouts were used over and over, fresh leaves being added to the pot as necessary. The tea thus produced varied from weak as pauper's gruel to so strong it could take the enamel off teeth. This morning it was a tolerable strength.

As Murdoch was pouring himself a mug, the ginger station cat rubbed against his legs, purring like a swarm of bees. He bent down and scratched her head.

"No, I'm not going to give you anything to eat, you slacker. See those mice droppings on the table? How come? There shouldn't be a one around here."

The cat smiled complacently and rubbed her gums harder against his leg.

"I mean it, Puss. Go find your own breakfast."

He picked up his mug and walked on back to his office.

Barely more than a cubicle, there was room for a desk, scarred and chipped, a chair with the upholstery poking out of the seat and a wooden filing cabinet with two broken drawers. Facing him were last year's posters from the annual police athletic tournament. Murdoch had won the one-mile bicycle race against stiff opposition, and he enjoyed the memory every time he glanced at his poster. Behind the desk were hung two obligatory portraits. One was of Her Majesty Queen Victoria in ceremonial attire, the other of Chief Constable Grasett, whose patrician face lent authority to the proceedings and also covered a crack in the plaster.

He sat down and, as he did every day, pulled open the top drawer and took out the silver-framed photograph of

Elizabeth. He'd taken it himself with his new Premo camera just after they were engaged. Unfortunately, she'd moved and her face was out of focus, but it was the only picture he had. He gazed at it, said his prayer, planted a kiss on the glass and returned the picture to the drawer.

Then with a sigh, he picked up the envelope and pulled out the photograph of the dead girl. Foster had propped open her eyes for better recognition and used tints to get a good approximation of her natural colouring. There was a light dusting of freckles across the straight nose and the cheeks were pink. Foster was guessing there but Murdoch thought, given the girl's strong body, it was likely she'd had a rosy complexion. Probably fresh from the country. He had to admit he was relieved he wasn't the one who had to notify the family.

By nine-thirty, he'd interviewed four people and more kept arriving. It was only Seymour's formidable presence that prevented the front of the station from sounding like a music hall.

Murdoch knew the body was not that of Simon Poyner's wife, who'd never returned from a visit to her aunt in Detroit and who'd now be about forty. When shown the photograph, however, Mr. Poyner had been caught in a timeless world and said it certainly could be Agnes with some meat on her. Likewise the girl was not Martha Stone, daughter of Ezekiel, who'd walked away from the household ten years ago. She would be fifty-five if she was living. One old woman, all agog with excitement, swore the portrait was that of a schoolteacher from Kingston who'd boarded with her last year. "Lovely young woman, lovely. So tragic." Unfortunately, the old lady's testimony kept changing according to what she thought he wanted to hear. One moment the schoolteacher had brown eyes, the next blue, yes, blue, of course. The age didn't fit here either but he

decided to send a wire to the Kingston police anyway. You never knew. There was an outside chance the dead girl might be related to the “lovely schoolteacher.”

He was considering going to make some more tea when there was a knock on the wall in the hallway. The office was too small to permit a regular door and Murdoch had to make do with a reed curtain. It was Constable Crabtree who pushed through. The curtain clacked and snapped behind him.

“There’s a gentleman out front, sir. Come about the notice in the newspaper. He claims the girl was his housemaid. Says she disappeared on Saturday night. The description does fit.”

“Who is he?”

“Quite a swell. Dr. Cyril Rhodes. Lives up on Lowther Avenue.”

“Bring him in. I’ve not had much luck so far. How many more now?”

“A good dozen, I’d say. Constable Graham and me are sorting out the wheat from the chaff for you.”

The constable left, the reed strips swaying in his wake. Murdoch turned to a fresh leaf in his notebook and placed his pen at the ready.

In a minute there was another tap and Crabtree pulled aside the curtain.

“Dr. Rhodes, sir.”

Behind him hovered a short, middle-aged man. Murdoch stood up and reached across the desk.

“Detective William Murdoch here.”

They shook hands. The doctor’s grip was light. Murdoch indicated the chair and Rhodes sat in it quickly. He pulled off his gloves, removed his silk top hat and fumbled with his silver-headed walking stick as he tried to find somewhere to lean it. He obviously wasn’t accustomed to being interviewed by policemen in dingy cubicles where the sour smell of vomit wafted over from the holding cell, courtesy of

last night's resident. The stables adjoined and they added their own contribution.

"Can I get you a cup of tea, sir?" asked Murdoch.

The doctor shook his head and reached inside his coat, which was of fine sheared lamb.

"My card."

Murdoch studied the piece of cardboard. Substantial, glossy white, plain black script.

DR. CYRIL RHODES
(Specializing in nervous diseases)
387 Church Street

He took his time, allowing the doctor to settle down.

"I understand you can identify the dead girl we're seeking information about?"

Rhodes nodded. "I do believe she is, er, was, our maid Therese."

Murdoch held out the photograph. "Was this her?"

Rhodes swallowed nervously. "Yes. Regrettably it is."

"Her full name?"

"Therese Laporte."

"French-Canadian?"

"Yes. She was from somewhere near Chatham, I believe."

Rhodes tugged on his trim beard. "W-what happened?"

"We don't know yet. One of our constables found her body in the early hours of Sunday morning. Over near Sumach Street. You live up in Yorkville Village, sir?"

"That's right. Birchlea House on Lowther Avenue."

Murdoch wrote that down. "She seems to have been a long way from home. What would she be doing over this way?"

"I can't-t say. I heard on Sunday morning that she had left. Sort of run away, really. She's been with us for the past six months but apparently she was home ... er, home ...

homesick. Our housekeeper, Mrs. Foy, found a note she'd left. My wife will be very distressed when she finds out. She was fond of the ... the girl. Spent a lot of time with her. Training and whatnot."

His words trailed off and he gazed at Murdoch anxiously. Then he patted his coat. "Sorry, I can't linger. I was at my office when I saw the notice. I had to postpone my appointments. Th-thought this was im-important. You'll want me to make a formal identification, I presume?"

"Yes, I will."

Rhodes was about to stand up but Murdoch frowned at him.

"I have to ask you a few more questions, sir."

"I don't know much more than I've already said."

"What were the exact contents of the note?"

"What?"

"The note that your cook found - what did it say?"

"Didn't look at it myself, but apparently it was about wanting to return home. She was from the country, you see. Got quite homesick. Often do these, these ... they often do, these girls."

"Indeed. Toronto must be a big change for them. When did you yourself last see Miss Laporte?"

"Hmm. I suppose it was shortly before the evening meal. Fiveish on Sat-Saturday. She was setting the table."

"Did she seem herself?"

"How do you mean?"

"Did she seem ill in any way?"

"Not that I noticed, although she didn't serve that night. Mrs. Foy said she was indisposed. Seems now as if that wasn't true. She was probably planning her getaway. Dratted inconvenient. My wife spent considerable time training her. She seemed most suitable. Now we've got to start all over again."

"So you do."

Murdoch thought he'd kept his voice neutral, but the doctor glanced at him sharply and blushed suddenly like a boy. He was not quite so self-centred and impervious as he seemed.

"You d-do ... you don't understand," he said.

"Understand what, sir?"

Rhodes waved his hand. "No m-matter. It is not relevant."

He patted his coat again, which seemed to be a habitual nervous gesture. "I do have appointments to meet ..."

"Of course. I will need to come to the house and talk to your servants afterwards." Murdoch thought this was a good time to give out some more information, and he explained about the body being naked. Rhodes seemed suitably shocked.

"We'll need a description of her clothing," added Murdoch. "I don't suppose you could help us in that regard, could you, Doctor?"

"I'm afraid not. She was the, er, maid ... after all."

"She wore a uniform, didn't she, sir?"

"Yes, of ... of course. A dark skirt, or dress rather, white apron, white cap. The usual sort of thing."

There was another knock from the hallway and Crabtree came in and handed Murdoch a cardboard box.

"The postmortem report, sir. Just delivered."

Murdoch hesitated for a moment. "Do you mind if I take a quick look at this, Doctor?"

Rhodes pulled out his watch again and studied it. "If you must ..."

Murdoch was already reading the report.

Toronto. February 11, 1895

This is to certify that I, Robert Moffat, a legally qualified physician in the city of Toronto, did this day make a postmortem examination upon the body of a woman, not yet identified. The body is that of a well-nourished young woman about fifteen or sixteen years of age. There were no clothes on the body when it was brought into the morgue. The

abdominal organs, kidneys, and liver are normal in size. Bladder is contracted and empty.

The immediate cause of death was asphyxiation. This was brought about by the extreme cold weather, which caused the lungs to go into contraction and therefore no oxygen reached the brain and heart. There were injuries to the left elbow, which was dislocated, and the left ankle, which was severely bruised. These injuries may have occurred after death and are consistent with limbs being displaced while in the grip of rigor mortis.

Murdoch finished reading while Rhodes fidgeted.

“Bad news, is it?” he asked finally. “She wasn’t, er, wasn’t attacked, I hope?”

Murdoch put down the paper. “No, she froze to death. However, as I’m sure you know, Doctor, a person doesn’t just lie down and take a nap in freezing weather.”

“Great heavens, she wasn’t inebriated, was she?”

“Apparently not. Did she have a history of drinking?”

“Not that I know of. Young g-girl, after all.”

“It’s not unusual. Anyway, that’s beside the point....” He looked Rhodes squarely in the eyes. “She was with child. About six weeks along.”

Rhodes recoiled. “Dear Lord!”

“I gather this is a surprise to you, sir?”

“Of c-c-course it is. I mean, she d-didn’t seem that sort of girl, not at all. Good gracious, my wife will be very upset.”

“Perhaps that was the real reason Miss Laporte left your house so abruptly.”

“I ... well, I suppose it could be.”

“Did she have a sweetheart that you know of, sir?”

Rhodes blinked. “Mr. Murdoch, I am dreadfully sorry for the girl but she was only my maid. I do not concern myself with the private lives of my servants.”

“Did your wife ever mention it?”

“No, she did not.”

Murdoch picked up his pen. "Would you give me the names of the other members of the household?"

"Are you only interested in the males?" There was an unexpected note of sarcasm in Rhodes's voice, but Murdoch liked him better for it.

"Everybody, if you please," he said politely.

"There is my wife, Donalda, my son, Owen. The butler, John Foy, and his wife, Edith. A stableboy, Seaton, er ... I don't recall his Christian name. Those are all the servants we keep. We live quite simply."

"How old is your son?"

Rhodes raised his eyebrows and looked as if the question were too forward, but he answered. "Twenty-t-two."

"And the stableboy?"

"I have no idea. About thirteen, I would imagine."

Rhodes patted his watch pocket. He was going to wear a hole in it at this rate.

"Doctor, you said you saw Miss Laporte at the dinner hour. Were you at home for the rest of the evening?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Murdoch, I fail to see ... Why do you ask?"

"Answer the question if you please, sir."

The doctor flushed at his tone. "Well, let me see ... In fact I was not at home that evening. Miss Shepcote was not well and the evening ended fairly early. I had some important work to do at my consulting rooms so I went there afterwards."

"Miss Shepcote?"

"She and her father, Alderman Shepcote, were our dinner guests. She and my son are, er, well, we, er, hope they will be betrothed fairly soon."

"What time did you leave your house?"

"I don't know exactly. Somewhere after nine. Owen took Miss Shepcote home in our carriage and I left a little later with Mr. Shepcote, who let me off at my office."

"And when did you return home?"

“Detective Murdoch, I must say these questions are s-starting to sound impertinent. What does it have to do with the girl’s death?”

“Allow me to read this section of the doctor’s report:

I was suspicious about the state of the deceased’s pupils, that is to say they were contracted to the point of pinpricks. There was a distinctive odour to the organs which I recognised as that of opium. When I examined the bruise on the right forearm under a glass my suspicions were confirmed. There was a tiny puncture in the vein consistent with the mark of a syringe. I then tested blood samples and found significant residue of the drug opium or a derivative such as morphine ...”

Rhodes gasped, but Murdoch kept on reading.

“My estimate is that there was not sufficient amount of the drug to bring about death but certainly enough to have induced unconsciousness. It is difficult to say when this would have occurred but might have happened anywhere from ten minutes to half an hour after injection. If she lost consciousness on the street, as seems to be the case, she would have been unable to withstand the freezing temperature. The stomach was empty. She had not eaten recently, which would also contribute to the power of the drug. There were what looked like bruises from a hand-grip on her arm as well. My surmise is that she was held forcibly while the injection was administered. Some person or persons is criminally culpable for her death.

I am your servant, R.D. Moffat, M.D.”

Murdoch paused and regarded Rhodes. “Perhaps now you can see the need for me to ask questions no matter how impertinent they seem?”

Before the doctor could respond there was another tap and Crabtree thrust his head through the reed curtain.

““Scuse me, sir, but there’s a gentleman out in the hall. A Mr. Shepcote. He won’t wait.”

Murdoch looked at Rhodes. "Could this be your dinner guest?"

At that moment the man himself appeared. He wasn't as tall as the constable but he was as wide, and a heavy raccoon coat made him wider. "Rhodes?"

He had a booming voice, and Murdoch didn't miss the almost involuntary flinching that occurred in Dr. Rhodes. Or the look of utter distaste that crossed his face. However, he got to his feet.

"Shepcote, I'm in here."

Crabtree backed away, squeezing past the newcomer, and Shepcote pushed through the curtain into the little cubicle. He ignored Murdoch and addressed Rhodes.

"Must be true, then? It *is* your maid that's been found. Harriet said it was her. What in Hades happened to the girl?"

Murdoch intervened. "Mr. Shepcote, I'm Detective Murdoch, the investigator on the case."

The alderman had a red wind-whipped face, thick blond sidewhiskers and prominent blue eyes. He considered Murdoch for a moment, then thrust out his hand.

"Pologies for bursting in like this. But it was a shock, seeing as how it was Saturday when I saw the girl alive. I thought I'd better do my duty and get over here. What in Hades happened?" he asked again.

Murdoch turned to Rhodes. "Would you mind waiting for me outside, Doctor? I'd like to talk to Mr. Shepcote in private for a moment."

"Outside? In the h-h-hall?"

Rhodes was reacting as if Murdoch had suggested he go sit in the privy.

"Did you come by carriage? There, if you prefer."

Rhodes left and Shepcote took the chair, undoing his heavy coat. Murdoch knew who he was. He owned the *Signal*, a popular morning newspaper, and he'd used it as a vehicle to get himself elected to the city council, splashing the front page for a month with his portrait and highly

flattering endorsements from local businessmen. As far as Murdoch was concerned the man was welcome to the job.

Shepcote was watching him with his head turned to a slight angle, as if one eye was sharper than the other.

"What's the story? What happened to that poor girl?"

Murdoch avoided a direct answer. "I understand you dined with Dr. Rhodes on Saturday. Is that where you saw Therese Laporte?"

"That's it. She's their maid, or was, I should say."

"How did she seem?"

"I can't say I paid much notice. She took my hat and coat and I went into the drawing room."

"Did she appear distressed? Ill? Disturbed in any way?"

Shepcote gave a snort. "Strange question, isn't it? Like I said, I didn't pay her any attention. I was there to visit Rhodes and his wife, not to hobnob with the servants."

Murdoch kept his head down as he made notes. "I can take that as a no, then, can I, sir?"

"You can."

"I understand you gave Dr. Rhodes a ride in your carriage at the end of the evening. You left him off at his office."

"That's it."

"What time was that, sir?"

"I've no idea. Must have been before ten."

"Where did you go then?"

Shepcote's face went even redder. "Look here! I came here as a good citizen because I thought I knew some poor dead girl. Why the hell are you questioning me like I was a candidate for St. Vincent's?"

Murdoch would have dearly liked to tell him to sod off but that was too dangerous a thing to do with an alderman.

"Because I'm investigating a serious incident. At the least we're dealing with manslaughter, at the worst, murder."

That shut his nab. Murdoch pulled over the postmortem report and read it aloud again.

Shepcote tugged a large bird's-eye handkerchief out of his inner pocket and wiped at his face. "Good God! Shows you can never tell with wenches. One in the basket! She didn't seem like a willing tit."

"We can't make assumptions, can we, sir? Connections could have been forced on her."

"Wouldn't she have said something? Told her mistress?"

"Not necessarily. She'd be afraid to lose her position."

The alderman stared at him for a moment in his lopsided way, then shook his head violently. "Terrible thing, terrible. But see here, Sergeant, you can count on my help. I'll make it front-page news."

And it'll sell you more papers, thought Murdoch.

"Thank you, Mr. Shepcote. If Dr. Rhodes confirms the identification at the morgue, I can go right over and get a description of the clothes she was wearing. It'll help us to trace her movements. Perhaps I could bring that information to the paper later today?"

"Of course."

Murdoch flipped the sheet of paper in his notebook. "And where did you go after you let off Dr. Rhodes?"

"What? Oh, yes. I went over to my club."

"Which one is that, sir?"

"The Yeoman Club on River Street. I stayed there 'til midnight or so, then went home. I suppose you'd like my address? One hundred and twenty Berkeley Street."

"Did you drive the carriage yourself?"

"I did not. Them days have long gone. I've got a man, George Canning. You can ask him, if you doubt my word."

"It's not a matter of doubt, sir."

There was the sound of footsteps out in the hall and again Constable Crabtree loomed outside the curtain. "Dr. Rhodes wants to know if you'll be much longer. The horse is getting cold."

"I'll be right there."

Shepcote stood up to leave.

"Just one more question, sir," said Murdoch. "Do you have any opinion as to who might have had connections with the girl?"

"Hardly."

"You're a shrewd man, Mr. Shepcote. Did you notice anything at all? Anyone eyeing the girl? Any little glances, a brush of the hand, that sort of thing?"

"You're sounding like a novel, sir. Our encounter must have lasted a minute. Didn't see her after that. But if you're looking for a culprit, you should go talk to the Rhodeses' stableboy. He's a home boy and we all know they have the morals of dogs." His voice grew louder and with a certain ring as if he were addressing eager members of the Mechanics Institute. "As a matter of fact, I'm bringing a bill to the council as soon as I can. We've got to limit our intake of immigrants. These children they send us are the offspring of degenerates and criminals. It's in their blood. You only have to take one gander at that boy and you can tell. Shifty-eyed as they come!"

"I understand the boy's only thirteen."

"So what? I've known boys like him and younger who've sired naturals like rutting dogs."

"I'll speak to him, sir. Thank you for coming."

"Yes, of course. Terrible business it is for certain. But I'll wager a month's salary that boy's the culprit."

And I'll wager we'll see that in your paper tomorrow morning, thought Murdoch. *And a lot of people will be only too ready to believe you.*

He was also struck by the fact that neither Rhodes nor Shepcote had commented on the presence of opium in the girl's body.

Chapter Six

MONDAY, FEBRUARY II

OWEN RHODES FINISHED FASTENING the skate blade to Harriet's boot.

"There you go. Ready?"

He pulled her arm through his and they glided off onto the ice. The rink was a cleared patch of the frozen river Don. Later it would get crowded, young men and women meeting after working hours to skate in the torchlight, but now in the morning the other skaters were mostly boys playing truant from school. A ragged bunch nearby had one pair of skate blades among them, and a fierce quarrel erupted as they tried to determine whose turn it was next. Some other boys were sliding on pieces of cardboard and shouting with delight.

Owen and Harriet skated past them.

"Your cold seems better," said Owen.

"It is. Sometimes I think it's better to ignore colds, don't you?"

"Absolutely."

In fact, when he had come to call on her late this morning, Harriet had been feeling wretched, but she wouldn't dream of forgoing the chance to be with him and had quickly agreed to spend a couple of hours skating on the river.

"You're an excellent skater, Harriet."

"Oh, I'm not. You lead so well." The exercise had whipped colour into her cheeks and her eyes glowed with pleasure. Owen felt a rush of affection for her. He squeezed her arm.

"Shall we waltz?"

"I'm a bit shaky still on the turns."

“Don’t worry, I’m a master.”

It was true. His hold on her was firm and confident and his strokes effortless. She gazed up at him. Even though the closeness of his body made her almost breathless, she liked it. He made an easy half-turn and smiled at her.

“There, well done ... Harriet, dear, I have a small favour to ask you. You must say at once if you can’t do it because it might mean telling a little fib.”

“Yes?”

She was thrilled that he wanted something from her. That she had something to offer.

“I’ve mentioned my friends Sprague and McDonough to you before. They are fine chappies. The best. And, well, you see, we’ve all developed quite the passion for billiards. A fellow needs some pleasure once in a while, don’t you think? Whoops!”

She almost stumbled but he pulled her around easily into a glide.

“I think billiards is a fine sport.”

“So do I. Anyway, what I wanted to ask you is this. After I left you on Saturday night I dropped in at Hugh’s house and we got into a few rounds. He gave me no quarter, nor I him. Before I knew it the clock was striking twelve. And like Cinderella I knew I had better be getting home ... If anyone were to ask, could you bring yourself to say that you and I were together, chatting?”

Harriet looked bewildered. “Who would ask?”

“To tell you the truth, Mother entirely disapproves. She’s afraid I’ll be distracted from my studies, that sort of thing ... Shall we have a breather?” He manoeuvred her towards a bench. “Would you do that for me, Harriet? Say I didn’t leave your house until midnight?”

“That would be very late, wouldn’t it?”

“We were in the parlour the entire time.”

She sat down on the bench, and a boy appeared at once at her elbow. His clothes were dirty and too big for him and

he was shaking with cold. He had a bundle of newspapers under his arm.

"Latest news, miss. One cent."

"No, no, she doesn't want one. Shoo."

"Exciting stories today ... The *Gascoyne's* come in to New York all safe -"

"No."

"A lady's been found dead as a doornail. Nobody knows who she is. There's a big reward for news ..."

"The young lady doesn't want to hear any of that sordid nonsense. Go away."

The newsboy kept his eyes fixed on Harriet.

"If I don't sell nothin' I won't eat nothin', kind missus."

"What a story. You look well-fed to me," jeered Owen.

That wasn't true. The boy's face was thin and pasty. Not even the wind could bring colour to his cheeks.

"Please, mister ..." His voice dropped to a whisper. "I heard as the girl was naked as a jaybird -"

"Get out of here. We don't want to hear about it." Owen handed the boy a five-cent piece. "No, keep the newspaper. Sell it to somebody else."

The boy grinned in delight. "Thanks, mister." He trotted off to where the boys were skating, dropped his bag of papers and started to beg for a skate.

Harriet looked at Owen. "I wonder what that was about, the dead girl, I mean?"

"Some sensationalism, as usual. Those boys are clever little beggars when they want to pump up a story."

He sat down close beside her on the bench and took her hand in his. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have asked what I did just now. It's too -"

"No, it's not at all. I quite understand. Father can be quite severe when he wants to. What you're asking is such a small fib. It doesn't matter at all." She lowered her head and he could see the blush flood her neck and cheeks. "Besides, we were together in my thoughts."

He leaned over and gave her a quick kiss on her cold cheek.

"And mine. Bless you. The subject mightn't come up but if it does, don't forget, Mother can winkle the truth out of an oyster if she sets her mind to it."

She smiled. "I can actually be quite good at dissembling ... I simply become very vague."

She wrinkled her forehead and pursed her lips to show him and he burst out laughing. "That answer deserves a bag of chestnuts. Don't move."

On the other bank a man had set up his brazier and was calling his wares. "'Taties, chestnuts, get them hot."

Harriet watched Owen as he skated off. He was wearing dark brown knickerbockers, a brown ribbed sailor's jersey and a matching cap, and she thought he was easily the best-dressed and handsomest man on the rink. And by far the most accomplished skater. Of course she could tell a small lie for him. There was no question.

At four o'clock, Murdoch and Constable Crabtree were seated in Brackenreid's office. The inspector claimed to have dragged himself in from his sickbed to attend to the matter at hand. True, his hands shook and there was a yellowish cast to his eyes, but Murdoch doubted his motives were so noble. He sensed the inspector was torn between ambition and nervousness about a case that touched so closely on a well-to-do family like the Rhodeses. Not unlike Murdoch himself.

Thomas Brackenreid's father had emigrated from County Cork during the potato famine of '51 and by luck and ruthlessness carved himself a living as a dry goods merchant. Young Thomas had known hardship from an early age and was determined to hoist himself up the social ladder, not much caring what heads he used as struts. He joined the police force as a young man and rose steadily up

the ranks. Late in life he married the indulged daughter of a local lawyer, and gleeful gossip around the station claimed she led him a merry dance. Before his demons overtook him, he had been a shrewd, hard-working man with a certain meticulousness about detail that served him well. Now, those qualities were more and more obscured.

As inspector, Brackenreid wore a fine wool jacket with brocade epaulettes and frogs down the front. Murdoch could see stains on the brocade and even across the table he could smell the beery stink of the man's breath.

There was a blazing fire in the hearth and the small room was uncomfortably hot. Brackenreid, however, hadn't given the other men permission to undo their jackets. Sweat was running down Crabtree's forehead and he had to keep wiping at his face, and Murdoch was feeling unpleasantly sticky. His stiff celluloid collar had started to chafe his neck. The inspector was also buttoned up but he seemed impervious. He took a noisy sip from the mug he was holding. His face relaxed a bit and Murdoch wondered what else was in there besides tea.

"Now, according to your report nobody laid eyes on the girl after five o'clock, and Mrs. Rhodes was the last to see her, when she was making sure the gal had set the table properly."

He had rigorously tried to expunge his native brogue but it slipped out now and again, through the *r*'s particularly.

He turned a page. "You say you're checking the dockets of the cabbies to see if she hired a cab."

"Yes, sir. She'd travelled a goodly distance from Birchlea."

"Don't mean much. She looks like a bonnie gal to me. She could have walked easily."

"True." Murdoch eased into the sensitive area. "Or she could have been driven in a private carriage."

Brackenreid frowned. "According to this, all the carriages at Birchlea are accounted for, and anyway they're all saying they never saw the kinchin."

"If they're telling the truth, sir."

"For God's sake, Murdoch, let's not tread into that sort of muck. It won't do us any good. I know for a fact Colonel Grasett and Shepcote are close as dilberries on a beggar's arse. The colonel attends the alderman's salons all the time." He gulped on his tea. "Of course the fact that she had her apron up might not have anything to do with the opium thing."

"I realize that, Inspector."

"None of them have an idea who rogered her?"

"Apparently not. Mrs. Rhodes was shocked. She couldn't believe the girl hadn't confided in her."

Brackenreid shook his head. "That's a fanciful notion. Her mistress would be the last person a maid would get snug with. She'd be more likely to deny it 'til she popped out the little bastard."

"Mrs. Rhodes said the girl had never had any callers. She was a Roman Catholic and was allowed to go to Mass on Sunday morning. They dropped her off at St. Michael's while they went to St. James's. They met her on the corner afterwards and brought her home. She didn't have any other day off and according to Mrs. Rhodes she never reported meeting anyone or talked of any new acquaintances."

Brackenreid chuckled. "Perhaps it was the Holy Ghost that did for the girl. Don't the Catholics call it Immaculate Conception?"

"Yes, we do," said Murdoch.

"Oh, beg pardon, Murdoch. No offence. I forgot for a moment."

"No offence taken, sir."

Brackenreid was perfectly aware of his detective's faith but always tried to get in a jibe or two at Murdoch's expense if he could. His own family had brought the politics of their country with them and he was a staunch Orangeman.

Crabtree shot a glance at Murdoch and wiped surreptitiously at his neck. He thought the detective skated close to the thin ice sometimes, and Brackenreid and he often eyed each other like two fighting dogs. Murdoch wiped a droplet of sweat from his nose.

"Can we unbutton our jackets, Inspector? It is very warm in here," asked Murdoch.

"What? Oh yes. Take them off if you like. It is hot, now that you mention it."

He unfastened the top button of his jacket.

Crabtree opened up his uniform, revealing a glimpse of red flannel underneath and an impression of redoubtable muscle development. He was the station's prize athlete in the heavyweight division of shot put and tug-of-war, and even though the next police games weren't until August, his chances were the subject of much speculation and interest among the other policemen. Murdoch could see the keen glance that Brackenreid sent that way, but he didn't want to spend the next half hour discussing the possible condition of Sergeant Anstell, who was number-one station's pride and joy. He unsnapped his collar studs and got back to the subject.

"I went to talk to the priest at St. Michael's this afternoon, but he didn't know the girl. It's a big parish. However, he gave me his tithe list and tomorrow we can start calling on the parishioners."

"Maybe she didn't actually go there. She could have been lying. Taking that time to get up to mischief."

"That's possible, sir. But given that she was a Roman Catholic I think it's more likely that she was reluctant to say much about her church at all in a family that was not of the same faith. People can be prejudiced."

Brackenreid waved his fingers irritably at the detective. "And they don't know anything about opium, I suppose?"

"Dr. Rhodes admits to using it in his medicines, which he makes up himself at the surgery."

The inspector stared at Murdoch. "That don't mean anything."

"I didn't make any implications. I'm stating the facts. The son, Owen, is a medical student and it's quite likely he could acquire the drug if he wanted to."

"It sounds to me like you're trying to stick a pin on a donkey's rear end, Murdoch. Just find out who seen the girl and we'll have the answers. Why don't you get out there and start asking some proper questions?"

"That's what we've been doing for the past day and a half, Inspector."

Crabtree wiped a damp spot from under his chin and shifted uncomfortably in his chair. He knew only too well the extent of Brackenreid's temper. His colour was rising, and it wasn't only the heat and his "tea."

"Have you gone to the Sheenies about the missing clothes?"

"Yes, sir. Two constables went to all the Jewish merchants on Queen and King but nobody has received anything resembling the goods. She left her uniform behind, but according to Mrs. Foy she would have been wearing a grey serge skirt, matching jacket with blue velvet trim –"

"I have no need to know all that. Can we get along? I'm still feeling poorly, I should remind you. Constable, what about you?"

"You've got my report there, too, sir," Crabtree answered quickly. "I questioned the servants and it's the same story. Nobody knows anything."

"What about the stableboy? He's a Barnardo Home boy, isn't he? I'd say he's a likely possibility."

"He's a timid little creature. Frightened of his own shadow. He never takes his eyes off you. Makes you think of a dog that's been ill-treated." Crabtree looked a bit embarrassed at his sortie into simile. "He's only thirteen and small to boot."

“That’s old enough. Boy in my father’s village had spawned two brats by the time he was eleven. Boys like that have no more Christianity in them than dogs.”

Murdoch was reminded of Alderman Shepcote’s words. Perhaps he and Brackenreid had had a good chin about it at one of the salon evenings for Miss Flo Wortley.

“By boys like that, do you mean orphan boys, sir, frightened boys, or boys from Ireland? As I understand, this one is English.”

Brackenreid stared at his detective for a moment, trying to determine whether or not to take offence. “Gutter boys, that’s who I mean.” He contemplated his mug, which was now empty. “Is that everything, Constable?”

“I’d say so, sir. The Foy’s claim they didn’t leave the house that evening and neither did the boy.”

The inspector fished a cigar out of a silver box on the desk and lit it. “Has anything come up with the Bertillon?”

“Not yet. The regular clerk is off sick and we don’t have anyone else who understands the system. By Friday, we should know if she has a file.”

Brackenreid blew a cloud of smoke towards the two officers. “I presume we are trying to get in touch with the family?”

“I sent a wire to the Windsor police and they’ll try to contact the local priest in Chatham. We don’t know exactly where the girl lived. It was a farm near there, but they’ve had a bad storm and the police don’t think they can get through until Thursday or Friday.”

Murdoch’s envelope was sitting on the table and Brackenreid took out the photograph and studied it for a moment.

“Perhaps she was a light-heeled gal, but she doesn’t look it. She’s got a sweet face.” He drew thoughtfully on his cigar. “Needless to say, I’d like to show that this station can work as well as any other, if not better. I want answers soon but I don’t want any feathers ruffled. Is that clear?”

Murdoch managed to bite his tongue. "Quite clear, sir."

The inspector flicked some ash into a dish on the table. "Dismissed," he said.

Murdoch and Crabtree went back to the orderly room downstairs, where Murdoch poured them both some tea. It had been steeping for a while and was as dark as molasses. Puss was cleaning herself diligently underneath the table. Crabtree added two spoonfuls of sugar and some milk to his mug and took a gulp of the tea.

"When I was there in the kitchen a-telling of the girl's condition the air was so thick you could've cut it with a butter knife. The boy looked like he was about to flash his hash any minute and the housekeeper almost choked on the soup she was tasting."

"I had a similar feeling with the Rhodes family. The son stammered and stopped like he was imitating his own father. Then he finally confessed that he had stayed visiting with Harriet Shepcote until midnight. They weren't chaperoned, and maybe that's why he was acting so guilty. His mother was furious. Not going to show it in front of me but she got very tight-laced, I can tell you."

"Do you think the young master got into the maid's drawers, sir?"

"Could be. He's a handsome fellow. Wouldn't be hard for him to steal the heart of a young country lass. Then again, she could've met some cove at church. It might take nine months to grow a babe but it only takes minutes to plant the seed. As you know," he added.

The constable had four children and another on the way.

"You're right there, sir," he said and he looked so glum Murdoch was sorry for teasing him. He motioned to him to continue.

"There's a back window. Faces onto the stable yard and opens into the passageway behind the kitchen. You could climb in there and be up those stairs like a bolt of lightning."

Both men sipped on their tea in silence for a minute. Then Murdoch said solemnly, "We can't totally overlook the other possibility."

"What's that, sir?"

"The Holy Ghost, of course."

Crabtree smiled.

Chapter Seven

MONDAY, FEBRUARY II

OWEN WAS SPRAWLED at one end of the sofa, his foot tapping restlessly, watching his mother while she fastened bands of black crepe along the mantel of the sitting room fireplace. The pictures were similarly festooned, the mirrors covered and the curtains drawn all afternoon.

"Shall I light another lamp?" he asked.

"No, thank you, Owen. This is sufficient."

Suddenly she stopped what she was doing and picked up one of the framed photographs from the mantel.

"Owen, look. How could I not have noticed before?"

She brought the photograph over to the sofa. "Can you see the resemblance?"

Puzzled, he studied the picture and shook his head. "Don't know what you're getting at, Mother."

"Theresa and Marianne. You must see it."

He shrugged. "Sorry, dear, I don't."

"It's not so much a resemblance of features as expression. See, the openness about the eyes. The mouth. Marianne always looked as if she were about to burst into laughter. Theresa had that look sometimes."

"If you say so. 'Fraid I can't quite see it myself."

Donalda replaced the picture on the mantel. "Marianne was not much older than Theresa. Far too young to die, both of them."

She hadn't really looked at the picture for a long time, and she saw it now with fresh eyes. The photograph was a small *carte de visite*, more popular years ago than now. They had gone down to London, to the best studio in Belgravia. Her

father was able to indulge in such things in those days. Both girls had worn their most fashionable dresses, shot silk taffeta with a high collar and ruched bodice, the new tight-fitting sleeves. They had only put their hair up that month, she remembered. Marianne had led the way as she always did, bossing her, determining what she would wear, even rubbing the merest hint of rouge on her cheeks.

Donalda touched the glass of the picture frame. A lock of dark hair was curled around the bottom of the photograph. Who would have known that before the summer was over, Marianne would be dead, the victim of a stupid accident? All their endless, earnest talks about dying an honourable old age, "full of pride at our noble deeds," as Marianne had put it, had come to naught.

"What are you thinking, Mother?"

"That the dreams of youth so rarely materialize."

"Dear me, that is gloomy."

"I feel that way today."

"That's understandable. Ever since I can remember you've told me stories about yourself and your friend." He hesitated. "Perhaps that's why you're so distressed now. About Therese. It's sort of like losing her twice."

Donalda glanced up at him. "I hadn't thought of it quite like that."

She sat down in the armchair opposite and stared into the fire, watching while the flames danced and jumped around the coal. And told her son the story again because she needed to.

The particular day was one of the glorious August afternoons that happen only in England. The blue sky was dotted with puffs of white cloud and the air was golden with sunlight. Marianne had wanted to go to the ramshackle hut that perched on the riverbank. They had played there since they were children and she had taken to calling it their summer house. "How utterly pretentious," said Donalda scornfully. She didn't like the spiders or the musty gloom

inside. She wanted to sit in the shady gazebo and read together. However, as usual, Marianne had overridden her objections. "It will be cool in there. It's an adventure, Addie. Don't be a slug." Finally, Donalda agreed on condition they play "Jane Eyre," from their favourite book. They'd played this game before and Marianne always wanted to be the mad Mrs. Rochester. The first time, she cried and wailed so convincingly that Wilson, the gardener, had rushed down to the hut to see what was the matter. Donalda preferred the part of Jane but they always squabbled about her interpretation. "She is afraid, timid," said Marianne. "You must wring your hands like so. Perhaps even faint. Then Mr. Rochester sweeps you up in his arms and carries you away." Donalda demurred, "She is made of tougher mettle than that," and insisted on addressing the crazed Bertha in a loud, commanding voice. "Stop that at once." Marianne scolded her in exasperation. "No, Addie, not like that. You sound exactly like Miss Thompson. You are not speaking to a naughty pupil, you are facing a woman in the grip of violent insanity."

But Donalda would only modify her tone slightly, and they played out the scene over and over, adding more and more embellishments until they fell to the ground sated with drama and imagination.

On this afternoon Marianne ran ahead and took up her position at the glassless window of the hut. Donalda followed more sedately along the towpath through the willow trees that bent to touch the gently moving water. Even on hot days the air inside the green tunnel was cool and damp, smelling of the river. She smiled when she saw her friend, dark hair dishevelled and tumbling down from its pins, face alight with fun, beckoning to her with a theatrical gesture. "Let me in," she cried, "let me in." Suddenly, she yelped and withdrew her hand. A rusty nail had torn the skin at the cuticle of her thumb. Donalda hurried over to examine the wound. There was a tiny blob of blood. "It's

nothing," she said. "Not nearly as bad as my knee when I fell last week." She donated her new linen handkerchief to bind the scratch. "I hope the bloodstain comes out."

Marianne wrapped her thumb and they entered into the game, Marianne waving around her bandage with great gusto.

When they returned to the house in the early evening, however, she complained of pain. Her thumb was throbbing and had become red and swollen. Donaldda was not overly sympathetic, as her friend exaggerated everything.

The next morning she came to visit and Marianne showed her the angry red streaks running down her forearm. "Betsy says if they travel above the elbow, I'm done for," she said.

"That's a stupid old wives' tale," Donaldda scoffed.

But Betsy was right, and neither contempt nor reason could protect her beloved friend. The infection raced through the young girl's body, the doctor could do nothing to stop it, and within the week she was dead.

Donaldda stood up, reached behind the picture and picked up the tiny glass bottle, beautifully coloured, that was behind it.

"What's that?" asked Owen.

"For my tears. We used to catch our tears and keep them as mementos."

"Let me see." He held the bottle to the light of the fire. "I do believe there is still a tiny drop of liquid in the bottom. How wonderful."

He gave the vial back to his mother and she touched it to her lips. Then she pressed her fingers into the back of her neck.

"Do you need your medicine? I can soon fetch it."

"No, thank you."

"Perhaps you should lie down for a little while. All those questions this afternoon, what happened ... it's been terribly

upsetting.”

“Owen, please stop addressing me as if I were an elderly invalid.”

“That’s not fair, Mother –”

She cut him short with a frown. “I hope you are intending to wear something other than that suit.”

“What? Oh, yes, yes, I will, of course. I haven’t had an opportunity to change.”

She herself was wearing a plain, charcoal-coloured gown that emphasized her pallor. The shadowy room also intensified the lines of fatigue on her face. He regarded her anxiously.

“Such a shock. You could have knocked me down with a goose feather when the detective – what’s his name?”

“Murdoch.”

“Yes, Murdoch, when he said she was, er, she was in the, er, family way. I had no idea.”

“I sincerely hope not, Owen,” his mother said dryly.

“Beg pardon? Oh, I see ... right. Who do you suppose is the guilty party?”

“I don’t care to know. It is irrelevant now.”

The silence fell heavily, and Owen shifted his position on the sofa. He wanted desperately to check his watch but he didn’t dare. Donaldda was contemplating the fire.

“There is so much I don’t understand. Why was she going home? She told me there was nobody there for her except an elderly father, and she was quite forthcoming about how strained their relationship was. He was terribly strict.”

“It must have been because of her condition. An unmarried young girl and all that shame. Where else would she have gone?”

“She could have stayed here.”

“Mother, that wouldn’t have been right.”

“I don’t see why not.” Again she rubbed at her neck. “And the opium! It is unbearable to think what happened to her.”

"I, er, I hate to say, but is it possible she wasn't quite as innocent as you have thought -"

"No! I know what kind of girl Theresa was. Something dreadful happened to her that she could do nothing about."

"If you say so, Mother."

Donalda looked over at him. "You seemed quite nervous while Mr. Murdoch was questioning us."

"Did I? Well, I'm not exactly used to having police officers perched on our best chairs demanding to know one's every movement. It's unnerving."

Donalda sighed and sat back in her chair. "I'd have thought Harriet was too ill to stay up so long chatting."

"She felt better when she was home."

Donalda stared into his eyes, grey-blue, so like her own.

"Is that the truth, Owen?"

"Of course it is. Stop worrying. You can ask her yourself." He patted the seat beside him. "Come sit down, there's a dear."

She joined him on the sofa and he leaned his head in the hollow of her shoulder.

She stroked his hair, then pushed him away, shaking her fingers. "Ugh, Owen. You really do use far too much pomade."

He smiled up at her, glad that the danger had passed. "I'm sorry. I promise I will abstain completely if you don't like it, and my locks will stand up on end like the wild man from Borneo."

She studied him for a moment. His skin felt rough at the jaw where he hadn't shaved yet and there were delicate tracings of lines at the corner of his eyes. She felt a sudden pang of longing for the boy who was no more.

He pretended to pout at her. "Do I deserve a kiss at least?"

She laughed at that and, drawing him closer, kissed him. "I'm sorry, dearest."

At that moment, the door opened and Cyril came in. He stiffened immediately when he saw them.

"Shouldn't you be at your I-lecture?" he asked his son.

"Not at this hour, Father. Just talking with Mother a bit."

"Y-yes. Of course. Yes. That's why I came down myself. How are you, Donalda?"

The expression of love she had shown her son disappeared at once. She had caught the look of jealousy on Cyril's face, and it ignited an old anger.

"How do you expect?" she snapped.

"Beg pardon?"

"How do you expect me to be, Cyril? I am extremely distressed."

He indicated the signs of mourning in the room. "But she was merely our ser-servant, Donalda. Don't you think this is a bit excessive?"

Owen groaned to himself. He knew what sort of response his mother would give to that. She placed her hands in her lap and laced the fingers tightly together. "Theresa was an exceptional young girl, and I had become very fond of her. I cannot brush off her death as if she were a failed kitten. 'Oh dear, what a pity. Well, let's get another.'"

"Please, D-Donalda, such hyperbole is unwarranted. I am a-attempting to show you some sympathy. One would think I were responsible for the girl's death the way you are carrying on."

There was a light of anger in her eyes but her voice was still controlled, the sharp edge of the knife only hinted at. "How could you be? You were safely ensconced at your office, weren't you? Where we can always be sure to find you."

Owen got to his feet abruptly. "I'm off. I promised Hugh I'd go over some cribs with him before tomorrow's class."

"Surely you're not go-going in that outfit?" asked Cyril.

Owen was dressed in a light check suit with slim-fitting trousers and a high stiff collar with a gold-striped silk four-

in-hand. He smoothed the cravat nervously.

"All the fellows are wearing these, Father."

"You look b-bloody ridiculous."

"He's going to change," intervened Donaldda. "Considering what has happened."

Owen bent over and gave her a quick peck on the cheek, which felt fiery beneath his touch.

"I won't be late, I promise. And I'll come and say good night. Good evening, Father."

He nodded at Cyril and left. Donaldda waited until the door closed behind him, then turned angrily towards her husband.

"Must you always address him as if he were a misbehaving child?"

"It is not I who maintain our son in perpetual puerility."

"Stop it, Cyril, please."

He was not to be gainsaid. "You know what I-I say is true, Donaldda. He is most immature for his age."

"He is not. You have sung that tune ever since he was born. 'You are nursing him far too long, Donaldda. Why isn't he walking yet, Donaldda? What? Can't he read yet?' If you had your way, he would have been at his desk doing sums when he was six months old."

"Don't be ridiculous."

"It is not ridiculous to love your own child, Cyril. To want to give them some protection from the harshness of the world."

"What you have given is not protection, it is mollycoddling."

"He seems to be doing quite well in spite of it."

Rhodes tugged angrily at his moustache. Lips tight, he said, "I am not as sanguine as you are, my dear. I ran into D-Davidson at the club. He said he was concerned about Owen. It seems that he has been missing many of his lectures. Not doing the work."

"Davidson said that? Why ... it can't be true. You heard him. Two or three times a week he stays late and works at the college."

"According to his teacher, that is not the case."

Donalda stared at her husband. She wanted to go on arguing, to deny what he said, but she knew it was pointless. There was a gleam of triumph in his eyes that meant he considered himself unassailable. Stiffly, she said, "There has to be an explanation. Perhaps he is with a friend. He is a young man. He cannot work every minute. Perhaps _"

"Perhaps the truth is we have raised a slacker. Afraid of hard work. Interested only in the intricacies of his toilet."

"Cyril! How can you be so cruel about your own son?"

"Unlike you, D-Donalda, I believe in facing the truth."

"What a pity you acquired such virtue so late in life."

He closed his eyes, tilted his head towards the ceiling as if in prayer. "I see. Am I now to get my annual castigation?"

"How dare you demean my feelings in that manner."

"Donalda, I have begged your f-forgiveness over and over. I might as well have spoken to a stone. There is no more I can say or do."

He walked towards the door, and she called to him.

"How very fortunate that with such a barren domestic life you can find satisfaction in your work. Where you are universally admired. Perhaps even *adored*."

Rhodes's face flushed and he bowed, coldly, as if she were a disagreeable acquaintance he wanted to cut. "Please inform Edith I will be dining at the club."

He left. Donalda remained seated, fighting to subdue the trembling of her body. She and Cyril hadn't had such a bitter quarrel for a long time. His words began to repeat themselves in her head. She knew that what he had said was true, and the thought was like bile in her stomach. Would someone else have forgiven him? Would another woman have restored love and respect between them? She

breathed in sharply. The questions were useless. The fact was her marriage had been destroyed many years ago and whether it was primarily her fault or his was a moot point now. It was far too late to retrieve.

She got up to tend to the fire, and her eye was caught by the silver-framed wedding picture at the far end of the mantelpiece. She had married Cyril Rhodes, a young Canadian medical student, the year after Marianne's death. She was barely eighteen, and she knew now that she had rushed into his arms in the naive expectation that life in a new country would bring her the happiness she craved. Had that young bride ever been happy, she wondered? She seemed so in the photograph, smiling and lovely in her dove-coloured silk gown with its delicate lace and beads. Cyril also was beaming with pride.

With a sigh she replaced the photograph. It was such a long time ago and those two young people full of promise and expectation were no more.

Owen was born eighteen months after the wedding, and by the time he was two she was carrying her second child. Had it lived, she would have named it Marianne.

She returned to the *carte de visite*. There was a resemblance, there really was, there in the full mouth, the round chin. Perhaps that was why she had become so fond of Theresa, had confided in her one night the way she had once talked to Marianne. She had whispered to her maid the old sad secret that she had told no one else.

She leaned her head against the mantelpiece. The crepe ribbon smelled faintly musty and the fire was hot against her legs, but she was impervious.

How could Cyril wonder why she never forgave him?

Chapter Eight

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 12

WITH A HEAVE WORTHY OF A CABER TOSS , Crabtree lifted the mattress and flung it to the floor.

"Hey, watch what you're doing," yelled Alice. "You could have broken my statue. That's worth a lot of dash, that is."

She snatched up a chipped plaster figurine, gaudily painted in gilt and blue.

"Sodding, shicey frogs," Alice muttered.

"Watch your language or you'll find yourself up on a charge," said Murdoch.

Alice glared at him. Both she and Bernadette had been asleep when the officers arrived, although it was well past eleven o'clock. Ettie had pulled on her frowzy satin wrapper, but Alice remained in an unclean flannel nightgown that had long ago lost its buttons.

Murdoch surveyed the rusty iron bedsprings. There was nothing hidden there except a couple of squashed cockroaches and a crumpled five-dollar banknote. Bernadette Weston snatched up the money and stuffed it into her bodice.

"I told you there was nothing here."

"You'd better give those other coves as good a bleeding going-over as you've done us," added Alice, waving her hand in the direction of the wall to indicate their next-door neighbours.

"Why are you picking on us?" snapped Ettie. "There are half a dozen other houses as back onto the bleeding alley. Frigging coppers."

"I said to watch your language," said Murdoch. "One more remark like that and you'll be in for the night."

Alice put her hand on Ettie's arm. "Don't go on so, Ettie. They're only doing their duty. Can't help themselves. Gents never can."

Her voice was suddenly arch, and she leaned forward in her chair so that the placket of her gown opened, revealing a flaccid breast and pink nipple. Ettie laughed and began to pull at the forefinger of one of the wooden forms on the mantel, which they used to hold the gloves when they were cleaning them. The constable abruptly concentrated on the upended box that served as their dresser. Triumphantly he held up a piece of pasteboard.

"Been visiting F. and J.'s, have you?"

He handed the card to Murdoch. It was a pawn ticket from Farrance and Jenkinson, a well-frequented shop on Queen Street.

Ettie scowled. "No crime, is it?"

"What did you pawn?" Murdoch asked.

Alice snorted. "My best drawers." She leered at them. "I can get on without them. See?"

Crabtree ran his finger around his tight collar. He was a young man and the needling of the two prostitutes was getting to him. Murdoch refused to give them that satisfaction. There was also a date on the back of the pasteboard from two weeks previous, which meant it couldn't be Therese's belongings that had been pawned.

The few spare clothes the women had were hung on hooks on the far wall. Under the bed, as well as the chamber pot, which was full, were two pairs of boots, one of newish black leather with needle toes. The ends were well scuffed and a button was missing, but the soles were not worn and the leather still stiff.

"I'll need to commandeer these."

"No you don't. They're mine," Alice said.

"Where'd you get them?"

"From Mr. Eaton's."

"How much did they cost?" asked Murdoch.

"Three dollars. I saved up."

"I didn't notice them before."

"That's you being nocky, isn't it. They were there."

"I'll have to check them out."

Alice wailed. "And what am I supposed to do without my boots? Some of us have to work, you know. I don't have no others."

Murdoch frowned, then took out his tape and measured the boots, making a careful note of the length and the appearance.

"All right. I'll let you keep them. Think yourself lucky."

"Father Christmas now, is it," said Alice sullenly.

Murdoch looked around the room again but there wasn't anywhere else they hadn't checked. In spite of poverty there had been some attempt at prettifying. A piece of flowered cotton served as a curtain at the only window, and the candle stub sat in a tin lid in the middle of a handmade paper doily. Another piece of cheap bright cloth was draped across the box.

"Nice picture," said Murdoch, pointing to a page from a popular ladies' magazine that was pinned on the wall. The illustration depicted a golden-haired child leaning against her mother's knee as she listened to a story. The woman's hand rested on the child's curls and her expression was full of tenderness.

"Ettie found it," said Alice with a touch of pride. "She's very artistic." She coughed, glancing about for somewhere to spit.

Ettie perched on the bed. "Are we at a bleeding exhibition or what? Why are you dunning us like this?" she asked. "The girl's shoving off had nothin' to do with us."

"We hope not. She didn't die naturally, you see. She'd taken a drug just before she died which caused her to go

unconscious. After that she froze to death. We're talking manslaughter at the least."

"What's he mean, a drug?" Alice asked Ettie. She seemed genuinely bewildered.

"Ask His Highness, he'll tell you."

"She'd taken, or been given, opium," said Murdoch.

"Oi, well, she died happy, then, didn't she?"

"Alice!" said her friend. "That's not respectful."

Murdoch spoke to Crabtree. "Let's check the kitchen."

He felt rather than saw the sigh of relief from Bernadette Weston. It was like playing the child's game of seek: "Warm ... warmer; no, cold ... very cold." He knew at that moment they wouldn't find anything incriminating in the kitchen. Wherever the plunder was hidden, that place was "cold." He was sure it was these two who'd stripped the dead body, but he thought that was probably the extent of their involvement. Jackey and hot pots was for their sort, not opium.

Ettie said sharply, "Don't forget to put this room back in order."

Crabtree pulled the stained mattress back onto the bedsprings. There was only one greasy blanket and a quilt that was once pretty but was so tattered now the stuffing had almost gone. A tiny feather drifted on the air.

Murdoch nodded at the constable. "We'll be getting on, then. Don't forget, we're dealing with a very serious matter here, Alice Black. If there's anything you can help us with, it's your duty to do so."

"Certainly," said Alice. She moved her legs into a provocatively lewd position. Crabtree blushed and bumped into the doorjamb in his hurry to get out of the room. As they walked down the hall they could hear Alice's laughter.

As Murdoch expected, the search of the kitchen yielded nothing. Next, they investigated Samuel Quinn's room, but

except for a bag of smelly, rotting meat that was inexplicably tucked in the back of his washstand, they found nothing untoward. Neither Quinn nor the dogs were anywhere to be seen.

The two out-of-work brothers upstairs protested the search with such aggression and anxiety that Murdoch decided to send out a bill on them to Muskoka. Find out if they had guilty consciences. But he found no women's clothes in the untidy, sweat-saturated room the two big men lived in. By two o'clock, he had to declare the search finished. When they came downstairs, both Ettie and Alice were sitting in the kitchen drinking tea, and they followed the officers to the front door. Alice was singing nonchalantly, a song that turned Crabtree's ears crimson and made even Murdoch uncomfortable. Ettie was quieter, but the wariness never left her eyes. The trail was cold but not totally so.

In the summer, sugar maples lined both sides of St. Luke's and the lush foliage hid the dilapidation of the houses, but the trees were bare now, the branches dark against the dull winter sky. A wagon, drawn by four massive Percherons, lumbered along laden with barrels for the Dominion Brewery, but otherwise the street was deserted.

Murdoch wrapped his muffler tightly to cover his chin, and Constable Crabtree shrugged the collar of his cape higher around his neck.

"That's it, then, sir. I thought for certain we'd find something. Disappointing, isn't it?"

"To be expected, really. Those two women are a shrewd pair. At least that Ettie is. They haven't really had time to get the clothes to the Jews and they're too clever to be using them as yet. Alice slipped up on the boots, which sure as shooting are stolen."

"Could they have an accomplice, sir?"

"Maybe, but it's nobody in the house. We'd better check out the neighbours, but somehow I don't think anybody'd

help these doxies. I got the impression when we went around before that Miss Weston and Miss Black aren't too popular."

"Women like that are a disgrace to their sex, if you ask me."

Murdoch didn't comment. He knew many of his fellow officers had similar opinions about prostitutes.

"Shall we start on the next house, then?" asked Crabtree.

Murdoch hesitated. "Let's go back to the laneway for a minute."

They walked down Sumach. The police ropes were still intact, but the curiosity of the locals must have been sated as there was nobody lingering there exchanging misinformation. And it was, after all, a working day.

They ducked under the barricade and walked to the place where the girl had died. Murdoch looked towards the backyard of the lodging house that was directly opposite. A soft glimmer of light shone through a crack in the curtain of the backroom. If he didn't know better, he would have considered it warm and inviting.

"Put yourself in their boots, Crabtree. You're frightened of being seen, you know there will be a search, where would you hide a few clothes?"

Before the constable had a chance to reply, Murdoch exclaimed, "Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I wonder -" He held out his hand to Crabtree. "Lend me your lamp, will you? And I want you to stand guard. Over there where you're out of sight of their room. If anyone leaves the house, detain them."

"What are you thinking of, sir?"

"I'm going to the privy."

"I wouldn't recommend it, sir."

Murdoch laughed. "Don't worry. I'm going to give it another look."

"I did check it before, sir."

Crabtree's face was disapproving. They'd done their job. However, he did as he was told and took up a position where he was shielded by the adjoining privy. Murdoch went back through the gate and quickly slipped inside the outhouse. There was only one aperture and the inside was gloomy and so noisome he was afraid to breathe too deeply.

Striking a match, he lit the wick of the lantern and a warm light flared in the cramped space. The rough wooden structure seemed completely bare, just a plank across the rear wall with two holes, one covered by a lid. He bent over the open hole and lowered the lantern into the space. All he could see was human waste not far below. Fortunately most of it was frozen, which cut down on the stench. A fat, black spider scuttled along a thread turned to silver by the light. Its meal waited, neatly wrapped in the centre of the web.

Murdoch straightened, moved the lid over from the second hole. Nothing! Bugger. He had convinced himself he had the right hiding place. He leaned down even deeper into the hole with the lantern.

Bull's-eye!

Beneath the neck of the plank he could see the edge of a piece of tartan cloth. He took off his hat, unwrapped his scarf so that it was out of danger and reached in with his gloved hand. The cloth was part of a bundle that had been hooked over a nail. He tugged and, cursing softly, finally managed to pull it back up through the hole. It was a tight fit and picked up some unpleasant smears as he did so but he didn't care.

The bundle proved to be a woollen shawl that was knotted together. He took off his gloves and undid it.

Wrapped inside were clothes: a grey serge skirt, a cotton chemise and petticoat, a black sateen waist. In the centre of the bundle, pathetically squashed, was a black felt hat appliquéd with pink silk flowers.

He replaced everything, tied the ends of the shawl again and went outside, gulping in the fresh air. Constable

Crabtree loomed out of the shadows and came towards him.

"I've found them, Crabtree. They're her clothes, all right."

The light behind him suddenly winked as somebody lifted the curtain. The shape was in silhouette but he knew Bernadette Weston was standing there watching him.

Mrs. Letitia Wright and Mrs. Mathilda Kleiser placed their cards on the silver salver in the hall.

"Please give Mrs. Rhodes my condolences. I'm sorry she is indisposed," said Mrs. Wright.

"Likewise," said Mrs. Kleiser.

"She wished to express her appreciation to both of you for your kind sympathy," said Foy. "She hopes to be receiving callers next week at the latest."

He had a little trouble getting his tongue around the last few words, and the difficulty was not lost on Mrs. Wright. She knew a tippling servant when she saw one.

"My, that long? Well, Mrs. Kleiser and I will certainly return at a more convenient time. I suppose she has already had a number of callers?"

"Yes, madam. People have been most kind."

Foy opened the door, but the woman hesitated on the threshold.

"Such a tragedy. The entire household must be in a state of shock."

"Yes, we all are, madam."

"Do you know what happened to the poor girl?" asked Mrs. Wright.

"No, I'm afraid not."

Letitia would dearly have liked to winkle more information out of him, but the butler was gazing purposefully somewhere at a point over their heads. Gathering their skirts, clutching their reticules, they allowed him to usher them out. As they walked down the path another carriage was drawing up to the door. The coachman jumped down

and helped out a young woman. All three women hovered for a moment, then bowed to each other.

"Good afternoon, Miss Shepcote."

"Good afternoon," said Harriet. She proceeded self-consciously to the front door. The older women continued on.

"That poor motherless child is quite the most clumsy girl, although I do regret saying that. And her hat? Wherever have you seen such a fright! A greengrocer could sell it and make a fortune."

Mathilda nodded. "To be utterly frank I cannot imagine what Owen Rhodes sees in her. Donald has been hinting they are to be engaged in the spring. She would push for it, of course. Harriet is a malleable little thing."

They linked arms, their wide hats almost touching.

"Shall we hire a carriage?" asked Mrs. Wright.

"No, do let's walk a little. It's not as bitter for once."

"That garland on the door was somewhat excessive, wouldn't you say? She was a servant, after all."

"Yes and no."

"What do you mean, Mathilda?"

"I wasn't sure if I should repeat this ... and you must swear not to tell."

"Naturally. I never do."

"Our nursemaid, Mabel, heard from the Felkins' cook that the dead girl was Cyril Rhodes's love child."

"No!"

"That's what I heard. How else can you explain such a fuss?"

"But surely Donald would not have accepted her?"

"You and I wouldn't have, but she's an odd sort of person, don't you find? Englishwomen often are ..."

They passed by a tall, dark-haired man who raised his hat politely. He was dressed in a sealskin coat and carrying a brown paper bag under his arm. If they had known it was Acting Detective William Murdoch going to Birchlea to

confirm the identification of Therese Laporte's garments, the ladies would no doubt have devised some excuse to return.

Chapter Nine

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 12

AS MURDOCH ENTERED TEMPERANCE HALL , the newsboys were in the middle of singing “We Shall Gather at the River,” with gusto if not accuracy. Some of them were stamping their hobnailed boots on the wooden floor; others clapped. He squeezed himself onto one of the benches at the back. All around him were boys dressed in the most amazing motley of clothes Murdoch had ever seen in one place: oversized cloth caps with loud checks, felt crushers, fur forage hats and coats and trousers that had all known previous owners. Legally, newsboys were supposed to be at least fourteen to get a licence to sell papers, but many of them were younger. Forced by necessity to hurry through childhood, their faces revealed a premature cynicism that was softened only occasionally with childlike simplicity. The hall was hazy with smoke from their clay pipes and dense with the smell of dirty clothes and bodies.

Murdoch took out his own briar pipe and lit it. Immediately, there was a nudge in his arm.

“Got some clippings to spare, mister?”

The boy next to him on the bench was still so small and young his boots barely touched the floor. His cloth cap was too big, and stringy fair hair almost obscured his eyes. Murdoch handed him a pinch but right away two or three other grimy hands thrust out at him.

“Some for me, mister?” “Hey, what about me?”

He distributed the last of the tobacco from his pouch and was grateful when there was a drum roll from the direction of the stage, indicating the meeting was ready to start. The

boys nearby lit their pipes, first borrowing a match from him, and the row was in danger of disappearing into a fug of smoke.

“Oo are you?” asked his neighbour as he puffed contentedly on a stubby, blackened pipe. Before Murdoch could answer, the master of ceremonies, a rotund man whose bald head shone white in the gas light, trotted onto the stage.

Murdoch had come to the newsboys’ meeting in the hope of getting their help. They were denizens of the streets, sharp and ruthless, honed to survive like cubs. If anyone would pay attention to a young girl out on the street on a winter’s night, they would. The master of ceremonies had agreed to let him talk from the platform after the guest speaker. No point in stealing his thunder with exciting talk of missing young girls. That suited Murdoch. The speaker was Godfrey Shepcote, and he wanted the chance to study him.

Shepcote was waiting in the wings. The hubbub from the boys excited him, and his round cheeks were even more flushed than usual. His valet, Canning, was beside him and he gave his master a quick brush-down across the shoulders. Shepcote had chosen his wardrobe carefully, a tweed jacket over a fawn waistcoat, beige knickerbockers, brown high boots that his servant had polished to a mirrorlike shine. The impression was of a man of affluence but insouciance. The rewards of the world sat visibly but lightly on his wide shoulders.

In fact, the annual newsboys’ meeting at Temperance Hall was one of the bright spots of Shepcote’s year. After him on the programme came a fiddler, a juggler and a mind reader, but this was his moment of glory and he knew the boys were waiting eagerly.

The master of ceremonies finally managed to get the audience sufficiently quieted down to make himself heard.

“Thank you, gentlemen, thank you. And a braver bunch of choristers I never did hear ...”

This elicited cheers and ear-splitting whistles. “All right, then, I know you’re all on pins and needles waiting for our next speaker. At least I assume that’s why you’re fidgeting in your seats like that ...”

There was great laughter at this remark. Newsboys, plagued by worms and lice, were notoriously itchy.

“Seriously, our man needs no introduction. You heard him last year and loved him; you heard him the year before that and loved him; you begged him to come back this year. So here he is, gentlemen. I give you Mr. Godfrey Shepcote.”

The noise was stupendous, the boys only too glad to let off steam, their voices stentorian from long practice.

Shepcote walked out to the lectern, bowed, basked in the din for a moment, then raised his hands for silence. A few whistles more and the throng quieted down, ready to listen. When he was sure he had their complete attention, he began.

“Fellow newsboys – I can say that in all honesty because you and me are fellows ...” He waited for the cheers to subside. “And even though many years have passed since I stood on those windy corners, I still consider myself a newsboy ... just a grown-up one.” He paused and pointed at somebody in the front row. “I saw doubt on that face ... and I don’t blame him. Who am I to stand up here and say those things?” He patted his paunch. “I don’t look like a newsboy. Yes, you may laugh, you may be skeptical, but I tell you, *we are fellows*.” He paused and leaned forward on the lectern. “I know what it’s like to be so cold your fingers and toes are dead wood, so cold your ears could snap off like pieces of frozen cabbage. I know because I was there. I know that ever-present companion of newsboys, the dog-fox called Hunger. He that gnaws at your innards ’til you could cry out with it ... but you don’t because you have pride. The pride of

those who must fend for themselves and who ask no quarter.”

There was now complete silence in the hall.

“I remember the voice of fear. I know that devil who perches on your shoulders and whispers in your ear, ‘Where is my next piece of bread coming from?’”

A sigh rippled through the packed ranks like wind through a hay field. Shepcote scanned the rows and it was as if his eyes met those of everyone in front of him. Even the tobacco pipes were laid down. The gathering was under his spell.

Murdoch became aware that a man was standing at his elbow and moved over to give him room. It was Shepcote’s manservant, incongruous in this crowd in his sober black suit and grey gloves, dark hair well-oiled and smoothed back from his brow. He nodded in the direction of the stage.

“He’s in fine fettle tonight, isn’t he?”

Murdoch agreed. “Amazing.”

Shepcote took a sip of water, moving slowly and deliberately. He knew how to play an audience the way the fishermen back east had known how to play a big fish, thought Murdoch.

Shepcote’s voice dropped lower. “I said *my fellows* and I mean *my fellows* because I have not forgotten, nor ever will forget, those many nights when the hard pavement was my bed, the celestial heavens themselves my roof, and my only covers the very newspapers I was selling ...”

There were some groans of recognition from the boys. Shepcote stepped closer to the edge of the stage, his face glistening with sweat. “Within these walls I have told my story before, but with your permission I would like to tell it again. Because even though it is my story, I know it is not unique to me. It could be the story of you, John Jarvis, you, Tim Black. Among all of you gathered here tonight there are similar journeys yet to be made, lives to be lived that may be even harder than mine was. And if I can be a guide to

you, an inspiration, I will fall on my knees and give thanks to Our Father that my pain and my tribulations have not been in vain. So I ask you, brothers, can I tell my tale again?"

He reached out with his arms like a suppliant.

The boy beside Murdoch whistled shrilly, his fingers in his mouth, and others echoed him. Shepcote waved his hands and waited for silence. It came at once.

"When I was a boy, so young I was hardly out of skirts, my father died. He was a good, Christian man, hardworking to a fault, but his illness was protracted and when he was finally called to his Maker, my mother was left destitute. I had one sister, a girl so fine of character, so noble of spirit, she had no place on this earth. My mother had barely put off her widow's mourning garb when she was stricken again with grief. My sister went to join the angels, a far more fitting place for her than this vale of sin we mortals call home."

He pulled a white handkerchief out of his breast pocket and wiped at his face. "At the tender age of four, I was left the sole support of a bereaved and poor woman. My mother was so overcome with her sorrows she repined on her bed, unmoving day after day. What could I do? I prayed every night for guidance until my knees ached. It was a bitter cold winter and I made a few pence by sweeping away snow, carrying bags for the wealthy women who shopped on King Street. Some of them were kind, some of them paid me no more attention than if I had been a wheelbarrow ..."

"Shame," yelled the boys. "Boo! Boo!"

"Come, boys, we must leave their sort to the judgment of the Almighty. Let me continue ... It was December, one week before Christmas. I had stayed out especially late, hoping against hope to make a little more money so I could buy my mother a gift for Our Lord's nativity. But it was so cold nobody was abroad and I could find no employment at all. I had not eaten. I was exhausted. Finally unable to walk another step, I curled up in a drift of snow against the cathedral. And I tell you, my dear, dear fellows, at that

moment I cared not whether I lived or died. Perhaps I fell asleep, I know not, but suddenly I heard a voice, a kind deep voice. I opened my eyes and there was a man standing in front of me. 'Child, you cannot sleep here. It is too cold,' he said. 'You must get home.' Perhaps it was his kindness, the gentle expression on his face, that I was not accustomed to. Whichever it was, it touched my heart and tears sprang to my eyes and sobs tore, red-hot, at my throat. I know what you are thinking: what sort of unmanly behaviour is that? But remember, I was still a mere prattling child and I was close to starving. I will pass on over the words we exchanged, that man and me. All I need to tell you is that he vowed to help me, not through mere charity, although he did that, but by guiding me to where I could earn my own living, to where I could hold my head up with pride. He bade me come early the next morning to a certain corner. I could sell the newspapers I would find there. I determined to do exactly what he ordered and as dawn was breaking I arose and went to that same corner. The stranger was nowhere to be seen, but as he had promised there was a pile of newspapers, neatly bundled up ..."

There was a hush in the hall. Murdoch could sense the stillness in the man Canning. Shepcote looked up to the ceiling.

"Who was he? I don't know. I never saw him again and sometimes I wonder to myself if indeed he was of mortal flesh ... but no matter. I had my newspapers and I seized my chance to earn my pitiful living. No playmates for me, no hoops and balls to wile away the careless hours. I was still so small the sandwich board was bigger than I was. In fact, on rainy days I would creep inside it for shelter ..."

This stirred a waft of laughter. Many of those present had done the same.

"But I worked hard. Where other boys walked a mile to sell their papers, I walked two. Where they got up at six to catch the first edition, I got up at five. Where they went home at

nine, I stayed until ten. And so we eked out a living. I took home my earnings to my mother, who with that pittance fed us both.”

He wagged his hand playfully at his audience. “Unlike many of my friends here, I did not waste one single penny on beer or tobacco.”

More laughter and friendly catcalling. Shepcote continued.

“In spite of my best efforts, my mother seemed weaker, more and more frail. Every night when I came home there was a nourishing broth ready, sometimes a hot stew. Oh, not a banquet by rich men’s standards, a paltry meal to them, but prepared with such love I felt as if I was eating ambrosia itself, and I left the table sated. Every night I asked her to join me at the meal but she always said she had already eaten. Child that I was, I took her at her word.” He pressed the handkerchief to his eyes. “Forgive me, boys, I can never say this part of my story without tears ... I was fortunate to have such a mother. I know that many of you have never been so blessed ... that you have never known the joy of a mother’s smile or the sweet sorrow as her loving tears fall on your cheeks. My dear mother died. You see, what I did not realize was that with the loving self-sacrifice only mothers can show, she was giving all her food to me and she herself was starving.”

He paused, searching the rows in front of him for acknowledgement. He found it on more than one thin face. Some of the boys were crying quietly. One or two put their arms around younger fellows. Murdoch himself felt a lump in his throat. The little boy next to him gave a loud sniff, and he patted his shoulder. The boy smiled up at him gratefully. Canning never moved his gaze from the stage.

“My dear mother passed away. Peacefully and piously, as she had lived. But she left me a gift. After her funeral, overwhelmed by my sorrow, I opened her battered old Bible to pray, and there, tucked inside, was an envelope. Puzzled, I opened it up ... and took out ...”

He paused, and one bold youth shouted, "Fifty dollars!"

Shepcote smiled good-naturedly. "Exactly. Fifty dollars. She had scrimped and saved and gone without so she could give me this legacy. Not a princely sum by most standards ... not enough to start a bank ..."

A lot of laughter now, the boys glad to be taken away from their painful thoughts.

"By the greatest of good fortunes, there was a stall for sale on my street, the owner old and tired. When I went to him with my fifty dollars in hand he laughed in my face. 'Send your father, laddie,' he said, 'then we'll do business.' It took him a long time to believe I was buying the stall myself."

According to Shepcote's narrative, thought Murdoch, he would have been about six years old at this point, but none of the audience was critical and he was never questioned.

"And that's how it began. I worked hard and honourably. No wasting my money on dice ... yes, you know what I'm talking about. I prospered. I bought another stall, and another, and then I bought the newspaper itself."

He waited while they applauded and whistled.

"Now I have the great honour to represent the good people of our fair city as an alderman. The other day, one of my fellow councillors came to me. I won't name him because it is to his everlasting shame that he said what he did. 'Tell me, Mr. Shepcote,' he said, 'why do you, a busy man, an alderman whom so many people look up to, why do you waste your valuable time going to speak to a group of rowdy good-for-nothings?' It's true, those were the words he used, I regret to say. I looked him in the eye. 'Why? I'll tell you why. Because among these so-called rowdy good-for-nothings might be the future leaders of the city. Wait ... wait. Among those rowdies are as good men as you will find in your banks and law courts. Among that rough lot are diamonds.'"

The whistles and shouting broke out and he could not continue. Finally he yelled, "All they need is a chance to show what they are made of!"

The boys stamped their feet, awash in the waves of excitement, empty bellies temporarily forgotten. Shepcote knew that the city council was planning to eliminate the grant to the newsboys' lodge this year, but he was not going to tell them that bad news. They would find out soon enough when the lodge door closed to them and indeed the pavement would become their bed.

He waved and bowed as the cheering and whistling continued. Finally the master of ceremonies returned. He shook Shepcote's hand and amidst stomping and clapping the alderman left the stage.

Murdoch turned to Canning. "Excellent speech. Was it true?"

The man's pursed lips relaxed into a small smile. "Some of it."

Murdoch would have liked to hear more, but with a nod, Canning stood up.

"I'd better see to him," he said and he left the hall.

Murdoch's pipe had gone out and he stuffed it back in his pocket, not wanting to arouse the cupidity of his neighbours, who were fast recovering from the mood that Shepcote had engendered. He had to admit to himself that a tear had formed in his own eye at more than one moment. Mr. Shepcote was a persuasive speaker indeed. The master of ceremonies started to call for silence again and Murdoch realized he was up next. He stood up and made his way down the aisle towards the stage. Over on the far side, some boys had started to sing. It could have been "Land of Hope and Glory," but he wasn't sure.

In the wings Shepcote mopped his dripping face and neck and took a quick sip from his whiskey flask. Canning

approached him, a towel over his arm.

“Well done, sir. I wish I had a story like that to tell.”

Shepcote didn't miss the irony in his servant's tone, and he scowled. “I doubt your life could be told anywhere except in a penal colony.”

In fact, a lot of what he had recounted was true. He had been left fatherless at any early age, but the man he generally referred to as his father had been killed in a barroom brawl. His sister had indeed joined the angels at the age of sixteen when she died of venereal disease. It was concerning his mother that there was the most fiction. Destitute, yes, but never for a single moment could she have been termed self-sacrificing. Her last words to him were vile curses because he wouldn't fetch her more gin. It was true that after her funeral he had found money. Hidden under the mattress. Money she had systematically stolen from his trousers, then forgotten about in her sodden mind. With the money, twenty dollars, he had made a down payment on a newspaper stall, cheating a near-blind old man by pretending to give him more than he did. But what was true was that he had worked and clawed his way out of the gutter, driven by a need to be better, to have the kind of comforts he witnessed in the lives of his customers, as distant from that skinny boy as the stars themselves.

And he had done it. He had a fine carriage and horse. A large house. He had married a woman from a better class; his daughter would marry even higher. But in the mixture of lies and half-truths he had handed out this afternoon, there was one total truth. He never forgot he had been a newsboy. Sometimes he awoke at night in a sweat of fear that everything he had built might be taken from him and once again he would be a pauper.

Beatrice Kitchen was darning her stockings, and she held the needle poised in mid-air as she looked at Murdoch.

“Sounds like an improbable story to me. As if angels would soil their hands selling newspapers. It was more likely some Methodist taking advantage of a hungry child.”

Her husband chuckled. “Now, Mother, let Will get on with his tale.”

It was late by the time Murdoch had got home, but the Kitchens were waiting up for him. Beatrice had made him a salty beef tea and he was sipping it.

“There’s not much more to say, really. Mr. Shepcote struggled up the ladder of success by dint of hard work and good morals. I believed him. He made me weep along with all the others.”

Arthur started to cough and Murdoch waited until he’d got his breath. Beatrice handed her husband a cloth to wipe his mouth.

“Any luck with the boys?” she asked.

“I think so. Of course there must have been at least three dozen of them ready to swear they’d seen Therese Laporte, in case there’s a reward in the offing, but two of them sounded believable. One boy described her exactly. He’d been trying to sell his remaining newspapers at the Somerset Hotel which is at the corner of Church and Carlton. He was turfed out sometime after nine and walked down Church. He says she crossed in front of him at Gerrard Street. She was going east. He said she was, and I quote, ‘a tasty bit of crumpet.’”

“Naughty boy!” exclaimed Beatrice. “I hope you gave him a slap to mind his manners.”

“I did.” Murdoch chuckled. “You should have seen him, Mrs. K. His name is Charles Elrod, but he’s got a shock of red hair and he’s been called Carrots so long he could hardly remember his real name. The other boy’s a bit slow-witted and he was vague. However, he was going home and claims he saw the girl at the corner of Berkeley and Queen streets. She was walking towards Sumach, which is about where she was found. His description was close enough. The problem is

he can't tell the time and doesn't know when it was he saw her, but he says St. Paul's had just chimed the quarter."

"If it was Therese the redhead saw and if she kept walking, I calculate she'd have been at Berkeley and Queen about a quarter to ten, so that fits," said Kitchen.

Murdoch grinned at Arthur. "We should have you on the force. Yes, that's what I figured."

"She could have hired a carriage," said Beatrice.

"That's true too. We're examining the dockets of cabbies who work in the area."

"Where was the poor child going?" asked Beatrice. "She's nowhere near the train station on Queen and Berkeley."

"I wish I knew. However, I'm going to check at the French-Canadian church on King Street."

"The old Methodist church?"

"That's it. There's quite a colony of tanners come down from Quebec and they go to that church."

"Funny how we all gravitate to our own," said Beatrice.

"I'm gambling she was heading there. I'll call on the priest tomorrow. Mr. Shepcote says we can run a picture in his paper free of charge as long as necessary. Somebody will come forward. And at least now we have an exact description of what she was wearing."

Beatrice broke off the wool thread with her teeth and slipped out the wooden egg that was inside the heel. She picked up another stocking from the pile in the basket and started to examine it.

"I can't get over the gall of those two young women stealing clothes from the dead. Heathens would behave better."

Her husband snorted. "They denied everything, I'll wager. Am I right, Will?"

Murdoch nodded. "Absolutely right. According to them anyone could have put the garments in the outhouse."

"Which is true, got to give them that."

"You should just send them to the Mercer and throw away the key," said Beatrice.

"We can't do anything until we have more evidence. We brought them down to the station and Crabtree and I were at them all afternoon, but they wouldn't budge. Problem is, you see, the privy is used by the other inhabitants of the house and it's quite accessible to anyone in the alley. The bundle was well hidden, but it would have taken only moments to put it there. We had to let them go. For now, anyway."

Beatrice had found a hole and was busy darning across it. "Have you recovered all of the clothes?"

"There was no, er, undergarment."

"Drawers or chemise?"

"No drawers."

"Hmm. Those are easy things to hide. You just wear 'em."

Murdoch knew for certain that Alice didn't have them. Perhaps Ettie did.

He sneezed. He'd started to feel under the weather, feverish and runny-nosed. Beatrice regarded him over her glasses like a bird contemplating a tasty morsel.

"My oh my. You look as if you're coming down with a cold."

He sneezed again. "'Fraid so."

She got up. "You just sit right there. We'll have you right as rain."

"Don't bother yourself, Mrs. K. I'm off to bed soon."

"No bother. I've got to tend to Father, anyway."

She left him and Murdoch grimaced. He was already familiar with Mrs. Kitchen's home remedies, and some of them were worse than the illness they were curing.

Arthur noticed the expression on Murdoch's face and started to laugh. Immediately the laughter turned into a violent attack of coughing that left him panting and weak in his chair. He spat bloody froth into the cup. Murdoch thought the smell was worse daily.

"Can I get you anything?" he asked.

"New pair of lungs is about the only thing that'd do me any good, and I doubt you've got a set of them in your pocket."

"Wish I had."

Kitchen waved his hand in the general direction of the door. "Forgot to tell you, Mother's trying a new cure on me."

The door opened at that and Mrs. Kitchen returned carrying an enamel bowl of steaming water. Murdoch jumped up to help her.

"Here, let me." He took the bowl out of her hands.

"Put it down there close to the fire. Arthur, we'll have to build up the coals a bit. Mr. Murdoch should be warm."

Murdoch started to protest but she cut him short.

"Take off your slippers and socks. Come on."

She sprinkled some mustard powder into the hot water.

"Now put your feet in. Careful, it's hot." He eased his feet into the bowl, watching the skin immediately turn pink.

"Sit back," she said and pulled the mohair shawl up around his shoulders.

He grinned. "I feel like I'm a boy again."

She patted his shoulder. "Good. You could do with a bit of mothering now and again."

She went back to her own chair, unobtrusively moving the tin cup from her husband's side table and putting a fresh one down.

"Arthur said you're trying a new cure."

She nodded. "I was out at the market this morning and there was a new egg-seller at Mr. Howard's table. Apparently he's getting too old to come down from the farm now, so this woman is selling the eggs and chicken for him. Odd thing she was, brown as a berry. Probably got gypsy blood. Anyway, we got to talking and I told her about Arthur here and his sickness. 'That's easy fixed,' she says. 'Make him take twelve raw eggs a day in some heavy cream. Keep him cold at night and don't let up 'til he's cured.' Well, I thinks to myself, it's all very well for you to say that, seeing

as how you're in the business of selling eggs. She must have read my mind. 'Cured my father and my own sister,' she says. 'And tell you what, I'll sell you a dozen for the price of ten. How's that?'"

"Course Mother agreed," interjected Arthur. "Even though we can't afford it."

"We'll manage. I'm going to advertise for another boarder. Should be all right if they keep to themselves, don't you think?"

"Anybody who stays here is lucky," said Murdoch. He stirred his feet in the mustard water, making a tidal wave in the bowl. He grinned at the other two. "I used to do this when I was a boy in Nova Scotia with the pools of seawater left behind at low tide. I'd sit on the rocks, put my feet into the pool and pretend I was God sending a storm."

As he watched the water slap in the enamel bowl he remembered his old game vividly. In the middle of the pool he floated a piece of driftwood to represent the *Bluebell*, which was the unlikely name of the fishing trawler his father sailed on. Gradually he stirred the water higher and higher until the waves overwhelmed the flimsy boat and it capsized with all hands on board. He played this over and over, each time with a mixture of Catholic guilt and a pagan delight that he had destroyed his hated father.

"... dear child, God rest her soul."

Mrs. K. was saying something. He caught the last bit. Ever since Beatrice had heard that Therese was of the faith, her attitude had changed. The girl had risen from one of doubtful character to a child rapidly approaching sainthood.

"Beg pardon, Mrs. K.?"

"You really were off in a brown study, weren't you. I was just asking if there's anything else missing. If she was running away she'd take all her belongings with her, I'd think."

"You're quite right. The housekeeper is sure she had a canvas valise and some extra clothes. Probably a skirt and a

waist at least. Her jacket and gloves are also missing. Apparently she had a rosary and a Bible but I searched her room and they weren't there."

Beatrice hastily crossed herself. "What wicked person would steal such holy things?"

"I'm sending Crabtree off to check the pawnshops."

"Will she be getting a Christian burial?" Beatrice asked.

"Eventually, but we haven't been able to contact the family yet. They're all snowed in."

"Pity poor them when they hear, losing a pure child like that."

Murdoch had told the Kitchens about the postmortem evidence, but Beatrice hadn't seemed to quite comprehend the full import. Then she surprised him, as she often did. She stopped her darning for a moment and looked at him.

"There'll be folks who'll say she was a sinner, her in the family way like that, but I don't. It's my view that somebody forced connections on her and made her take that opium. Whoever they are, God will punish them. And if in his wisdom He doesn't see fit to do it in this lifetime, I sincerely hope the law will."

Chapter Ten

He looked up at the whore standing above him. Her bare foot was raised and he could see the dirt beneath the ragged toenails. She had splashed on copious amounts of cologne and as always the combination of stale sweat, rank perfume and self-disgust made him want to retch. He'd fought against his need to visit her but finally had capitulated. The defeat, even though it was of his own making, made him angry.

She tapped his nose lightly with her toe. "You don't have to worry about names here. It don't matter to me what you call yourself. You could be the Prince himself for all I care."

He sat back on his heels and took her foot in both his hands. "I'm glad about that. It could hurt both of us very much if anyone found out. Do you understand?"

Grimacing with pain, she nodded.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 13

ALL WEDNESDAY, SNOW FLOATED DOWN in fat, slow flakes that children caught on their tongues, pretending it was ice cream. When night came the manure-dotted streets lay beneath a blanket of clean, fresh snow that sparkled in the light of the gas lamps. By eight o'clock most of the city's residents were indoors, and even along Queen Street the smooth surface was unmarred by footprints. Only outside the doors of the John O'Neil was the snow heavily dented.

Samuel Quinn, with Princess at his heels, pushed open the big door of the taproom, and the din and the smoke rushed out together. At the far end a hunchback was thumping out popular music-hall songs on the battered, out-of-tune piano, and a group of men and women, arms linked, stood around him, bellowing out the words.

*"And lo it was her father,
Rum ti-iddle ey oh,
And lo it was her father..."*

One of the women was Bernadette Weston. She was singing at top voice, head thrust back, mouth wide open. The brim of her hat had tilted under such strenuous efforts and settled at an angle across her right eyebrow, and a scrawny green feather bobbed and danced in time to the music. She noticed Quinn and winked at him but didn't break rhythm for a moment.

He waved, then, tugging at the piece of twine attached to his dog's collar, dived into the crowd, heading for one of the long plank tables by the far wall where he could see Alice was sitting. Princess tried to lap at some sticky mess on the floor but he pulled her away. Cuspidors were provided but few used them, and the freshly strewn sawdust was churned into clumps by the mixture of tobacco juice, melting snow and phlegm.

"Heads up!"

A sweating waiter in shirtsleeves, his leather apron stained and wet from splashes, squeezed by Quinn, his laden tray held high. The beer that was brewed at the John O'Neil tended to be sour and weak but it didn't seem to matter. The customers came for the company, not the brew.

"Comin' through. 'Cuse me." Quinn used his elbows for emphasis and the bodies reluctantly yielded. He was known here, and a couple of the men slapped him on the shoulder. There were only a few women and one of them, jammed in the side bench, smiled and beckoned, but he moved on. His eyes were already smarting from the thick pall of smoke from innumerable pipes and cheap cigars.

Alice hadn't seen him yet; she was intent on her companion, a man Quinn didn't recognize. He was burly, clean-shaven with his hair cropped very short. There was a

flattened appearance to his face that made Samuel think of prizefighters.

He slid in beside Alice on the bench, wrapped the twine around the leg of the table and pushed Princess underneath. She sniffed with interest at the other man's boots.

"Oi, look what the cat dragged in," said Alice. "Where've you been keepin' yourself?"

"Busy working. Not like some as I know of." He gave her a friendly poke in the ribs and she squealed. Her sense of humour was already enhanced by hot gin.

"You're forgetting your manners, Alice. Aren't you going to introduce me?"

"This here's Jack," she said, indicating the man beside her. "He's just passing through. His name's Jack and he's a Jack Tar."

"How'd you do," said Samuel. He called to the beleaguered waiter. "What'll you have?" he asked the other two. "It's on me."

"Oi, come into money, have you? Lucky for you. How'd that happen?"

"Never mind. Do you want a drink or not?"

"Another hot jackey'd go down nice," she said.

The man nodded. "Same. Thanks." His voice was husky and strained as if he had laryngitis.

Samuel gave the order to the waiter, taking a pint of beer for himself. He took a folded newspaper out of his pocket and put it on the table.

"Look at this, Alice. It's concerning that young girl the police were asking us about yesterday -"

"I don't want to hear one more word about that sodding mort. You'd think she was the Queen's daughter, all the fuss that's being made."

"What's the story? I don't know nothing about it," her companion said.

Alice sniffed. "You don't want to. Bloody coppers, they're always on at a girl. Ettie and me wasted all yesterday

afternoon at the shicey station just because they thought we'd nimmed the girl's clothes."

She stayed her indignation while the waiter banged down two glasses of gin, a pitcher of hot water and a pint of ale. Then she added a couple of splashes of water to the gin and took a deep gulp. "As if we'd do anything like that. What do they take us for? Couldn't prove nothing, we was asleep -"

"If you'll rein in a minute, Alice, I'll tell you what it says in here," said Quinn. "They're offering a reward for information."

He sipped at his beer, wiped the foam from his moustache and prepared to read. At that moment an arm reached over his shoulder.

"Give us a swallow, will you, Sam. I'm fair parched."

Bernadette didn't wait for his answer but seized the glass and drank some beer.

"He's buying tonight, Ettie," said Alice. "Why don't you order one?"

"Won't say no."

Good-naturedly, Quinn flagged down the waiter again and a foaming mug of beer splashed on the table.

"Ettie, sit down and listen to this," said Alice. "There's somethin' else in the paper about that dead girl."

Bernadette glanced quickly at Alice and pulled out the chair. She removed her hat and fanned at her hot face.

"Hard work, all that singing." Princess popped her head up from under the table and pawed at Bernadette's knee. "Hey, lookit who's here." She rubbed the dog's ears affectionately. Then she reached down and offered her mug of beer. The hound lapped at the drink thirstily. Quinn watched.

"That's enough now. Don't want to get her soused."

"First time I've ever seen a dog drink brew," said Jack.

Bernadette took back the glass and finished off the beer. "Ain't seen much, then, have you?"

"Ettie, don't be cheeky. Jack here is a well-travelled man."

"That so? Like where? Where have you been?"

He smiled, a smile that didn't come close to touching his eyes. "Britain, France, China twice. You name it."

"What are you, a sailor?"

"That's right, a saucer and plate."

"What?"

"First mate."

"He's speaking rhyming slang," said Alice. "The cockneys do it in London."

"Sounds like barmy talk to me."

"Ettie," protested Alice. "Jack's a stranger here. You're not being very neighbourly."

"Do you want to see my how-d'you-do?" the sailor asked.

"No."

"I mean my tattoo."

"Yeah. Come on, Jack, let's see," said Alice.

He pulled off his right glove and pushed up his sleeve.

"Lord love us, look at that," gasped Alice.

A red snake curled around his forearm and wrist. The mouth was open and the fangs, which ran along the edge of his thumb and forefinger, were gripping a woman, stark naked and bleeding. He spread his fingers and the woman's legs opened.

"Cheeky," said Alice.

"What d'you think?" the sailor asked.

Ettie shrugged. "Not much. I've seen better." She turned to Quinn and indicated the little white ribbon that was pinned to her velvet jacket. "How do you like me bow, Sam?"

He grinned. "Don't tell me you've joined the Temperance League?"

"That's it. I'm taking the Pledge next week. They stand you to a swell tea, cakes and sandwiches, all you can eat. I've been practising."

She pouted like a little girl, putting her finger to her mouth. "I pledge that lips that touch liquor will never touch my ... lips."

The sailor grinned. "You make me want to be an abstainer this minute."

Quinn rattled the newspaper. "Do you want to hear this news or not?"

Jack smiled again. "Let's get another round of blinks first, on me."

Ettie shook her head. "I'm going back to sing in a minute. Sam, get on with it, for Christ's sake."

Quinn swallowed the rest of his beer so he could take advantage of the stranger's offer. He was glad Ettie was being surly with the man. He was too cool a customer by far. But she was like that. Formed strong likes and dislikes right away. God help the man she took a scunner to. She could freeze hell over with one look when she wanted to.

He picked up the paper and read aloud.

Information sought: The investigation continues into the death of Therese Laporte, the lovely young woman who died so tragically last Saturday night. Anyone who saw this young woman on Saturday night between the hours of five o'clock and midnight is asked to report to Detective Murdoch at number-four station immediately. She was known to be wearing -

"Bloody hell, Sam, don't go on with that. We've heard it already, haven't we, Ettie? Get to the bit about the reward."

In the public interest, the owner of the *Signal* is offering a reward of fifty dollars for any honest information that our officers will deem useful in clearing up the mysteries of this tragic episode.

"Fifty dollars!" exclaimed Alice.

Ettie frowned. "nothin' for us. We didn't see her. Too bad." Quinn continued.

We must ensure that our streets remain safe for our loved ones and for those who cannot fend for themselves. If we do not eliminate the riffraff

that are pouring into our city on a daily basis, we are condemning the fairer sex to a life of perpetual fear.

“What’s it mean?” asked Alice in bewilderment. “Who’s the riffraff? Do they mean lumberjacks?”

The sailor shook his head. “Haven’t you heard of those immigrants coming in from Moldavia?”

Alice laughed. “Where in God’s name is that? Oh, never mind. I doubt if I’ll be going there in the near future. My carriage has got a wheel missing.” She pursed her lips again. “Read that bit once more, Sam. About the reward. Fifty dollars ...”

Bernadette caught her friend’s sleeve. “Alice! Why don’t you come and sing with me.”

Alice pulled away. “I don’t want to, Ettie. Jack and me was having a good chin. Weren’t we, Jack?”

She leaned toward him so that her breast was brushing against his arm.

“Why’re you so interested in that money? Do you have some information about the girl?” he asked.

“No, she doesn’t,” said Ettie. “She’s just dreaming, aren’t you, Alice?”

“No, I -”

“You heard me.”

Alice stared sullenly at her friend. “Yeah. I don’t know anything. Never have,” she muttered.

Bernadette stood up abruptly. “That’s my song he’s playing. Sam, thanks for the beer. See you, Captain. ‘Bye, lovey.”

This was addressed to the bitch under the table. Ettie gave her an affectionate caress and returned to the piano, where the hunchback was beginning a plaintive series of chords. Resignedly, Quinn folded up the paper and sat back in his chair to watch.

Alice pressed harder on the stranger’s arm. “Don’t mind her. She’s moody.”

The piano player thumped out a chord to get attention. The noise in the bar lessened slightly and Ettie began to sing. Her voice was clear and true as water.

*"I stand in a land of roses
But I dream of a land of snow ..."*

The room quieted even more.

*"When you and I were happy
In the days of long ago."*

Alice Black leaned forward, beckoned to her companion as if to whisper and slyly licked the inside of his ear.

He laughed. "Hey, that tickled."

"I'm good at tickling, I am. Here, I'll show ya."

She did so, more slowly this time. He didn't move away. "Did you like that?" she asked.

"Yep. That was real nice, Elaine."

"Alice. Not Elaine. My name's Alice."

He reached over and touched the bead necklace she had around her neck. "That's pretty. Most unusual. Where'd you get it?"

She caught hold of his bare hand and put one of his fingers in her mouth. "Who cares?"

She thrust her tongue in between his fingers and he grinned again.

"Tell you what, Miss Alice, why don't you take me somewhere private. Where you can tickle away to your heart's content."

She grinned. "Two dollars?"

"You're dear."

"I'm worth it, you'll see. Where d'you want to go, upstairs or to our place?"

"I've a better idea. You can come to my dodgy figs. Very private. I've got a couple of good bottles tucked away just

dying to be opened. Got them in Turkey.”

“You’re on. I’ve never had Turkish brew before.”

“You’ll love it. Come on, pick up your faggot sacks and let’s go.”

She gulped back the dregs of the gin and they both stood up. Quinn was watching Bernadette and didn’t pay any attention. Alice started to lead the way to the door, shoving at the hot bodies that crowded the floor.

“Coming through. Move your carcass, you lumps.”

However, as they approached the piano, Ettie was finishing her song. The piano player tinkled the treble keys. A burst of applause came from those who had free hands. Ettie, flushed and excited, bowed lavishly. The hunchback launched into another song and a burly man whose sooty clothes betrayed his calling started to sing an old ballad.

“Where have you been today, Randall my son?

Where have you been today, my beloved son?”

Ettie was about to join in when she saw Alice. She stepped back.

“Where you going?” she asked, grabbing her hard by the arm.

Alice tried to shrug her off but couldn’t. “With him.” Alice jerked her head in Jack’s direction. He was watching them with his flat cold eyes, but the waiter had stopped to serve one of the tables and he was separated from the two women.

“I don’t like him,” hissed Ettie.

“Well, it’s a good thing you’re not the one going with him, then.”

“Alice, don’t go. I wouldn’t trust him as far as I could throw him.”

“Ha. Since when are you so choosy? If we only went with cullies we liked the look of, we wouldn’t do nothing.”

*"What will you leave your mother, Randall my son?
What will you leave your mother, my beloved son?"*

The chimney sweep was warbling in a lovely countertenor. All around the room men were laughing, ignoring him.

Ettie scowled. "He's a liar. He's no sailor, his hands are too soft. I had a sailor once. His hands were all rutted and hard. He said it was from the ropes."

"What is he, then?"

"Probably a nark."

Alice looked over at Jack, still blocked by the waiter, who was having a dispute with one of the patrons about his bill.

"No! He can't be."

"Yes, he could. You've been babbling all over him about that girl. We're going to end up in the Mercer if you don't shut up ... And I told you not to wear that necklace. Not yet. We've got to be careful."

Jack finally got around the waiter and came up to them. "Shall we do a heel and toe?"

Alice looked at him and Ettie, then put her arm through his.

"I can't wait."

They pushed their way to the door. Ettie watched, then shrugged and turned back to the piano. The chimney sweep reached out his grimy hands to her and theatrically she took hold of them and joined in the ballad.

*"What will you leave your sweetheart, Randall my son?
What will you leave your sweetheart, my beloved son?"*

The hunchback joined in, his voice rich and deep.

*"A rope to hang her, mother,
A rope to hang her, mother.
Oh, make my bed soon for I'm sick to my heart,
and fain would lie down."*

Outside in the street, Alice shivered in the cold and pulled her shawl tightly around her chest. The sailor took her arm.

"I've a friend I'd like you to meet. We'll go there first."

"I thought it was going to be you and me."

"Later. Him first."

"It's all the same to me," said Alice.

Chapter Eleven

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 13

THE CARRIAGE LURCHED and Alice almost fell forward into the lap of the man seated opposite her.

"Oops. What'd we do, run over a dead dog?"

"Just a lump of ice."

He pushed her back into her own seat. The sailor had brought her to this man but she didn't fancy him at all. He was as twitchy as a schoolboy, refused to tell her his name, and had barely said a word the entire ride.

She straightened up and sat back, fanning herself. "It's bloody roasting in here."

She started to unbutton her jacket.

"No sense being uncomfortable, is there?" She giggled wildly, then hiccuped. "What'd you put in that drink? I can't feel my nose."

The man sipped at the silver flask he was holding. "It's just first-quality scotch. Perhaps you're not used to it."

Even well on her way to total drunkenness as she was, Alice picked up the contempt in his voice. She scowled.

"I've had good grog before. Lots of times. Just as good as your Turkey muck."

She was sweating in earnest now.

"Can we open the bleeding window? I'm going to melt, else."

She went to pull up the blind on the window closest to her but the man caught her arm.

"I'd rather you didn't."

"Why not?"

"I value my privacy."

"Nobody's going to see you out here except the ducks."

She had lifted the blind enough to see that they were close to the lake, trotting slowly along a narrow spit.

The man leaned over and lowered the wick on the porcelain lamp that hung from a bracket above the door. The carriage darkened, the shadows so deep she could hardly see his face.

"That's much cozier, wouldn't you say?"

She shrugged. "I suppose so."

She'd had all sorts; some liked daylight, some didn't. She could tell he was one of the play-acting kind. They always wanted you to make out you was enjoying yourself. Ooh and aah and wriggle. When all you could think about was the chops you'd cook for your tea and how long was he going to take to finish the jig. That kind of cully always left red-faced with a couple of dollars on the pillow. "Buy yourself a little present." Sod the fools. She giggled to herself.

Good thing they weren't mind readers.

"Can you share the joke, Alice?"

She yawned. She suddenly felt so tired she thought she could fall asleep right there.

"Wasn't anything. But I'm bloody whacked. Can we go back now?"

"I thought you were enjoying the ride."

Alice sighed. "'S bloody marvellous."

He leaned forward. He was sweating and there was an unpleasant smell coming from him. Maybe she was his first wagtail. The Johnny Raws were always scared out of their nobby drawers.

"I understand you have information about that girl who froze to death ..."

"Did Jack tell you that? It was supposed to be a secret."

"He tells me everything. Are you going to go to the police and claim your reward?"

"I might, 'cept Ettie's all miffy. She doesn't want me to say anything because she thinks it'll get us into trouble."

"I don't see how giving information to the police could get you into trouble. You're doing your civic duty."

"Don't I always."

"What was it you saw? Perhaps I can tell you if it is worth bothering the police about."

Alice struggled to make sense of what he was saying. He seemed to be going a long way off.

"Stop mumbling," she said. "Course it is. They'd love to know. She got into a carriage, didn't she?"

"Who did?"

"The mort, the girl, who'd you think?"

"Is that so? Where?"

"Yes, it is so, and I saw her on Queen Street. Just past the hotel."

"When was this?"

"'Bout ten o'clock on Saturday night."

"Are you sure it was the same person? Could have been anybody."

"Of course I'm sure. There aren't two women in the whole town with a hat like that. I saw her get into a carriage right at the corner."

"That is very strange. On the other hand there are so many carriages in Toronto I'm not sure if your information will be that helpful."

"Well, you're wrong, Mr. Know-It-All. This one belonged to a swell. I'd know it anywhere ... " Groggily she shook her head. "Shouldn't be talking ... Ettie said not to tell anyone ... "

"So you told Ettie, did you?"

"Course I did. She's my best mate. I love Ettie."

She was having great difficulty sitting upright.

"You seem so tired, Alice. Why don't you put your feet up? Here, let me help you with your boots ... My, they're tight, aren't they?"

He tugged and the boots came off with a plop, the rancid odour of Alice's dirty stockings filling the carriage.

"It's sodding hot in here. Look at you, you're sweating like a pig." She giggled again. "Do pigs sweat? Can't say I've noticed ... Wish you'd speak up. It's too dark. Are we in the Other Place? You're not the Devil, are you?"

"Far from it. I'm your Good Angel. In fact, I'm going to send you to Paradise."

He turned and tugged at a short leather thong attached to the upholstery of the seat behind him. A section came away. Behind it was a built-in cabinet.

Alice lifted her head. "Oi. What you got in there, the family jewels?"

"As good as."

He took out a glass vial and a burgundy leather case. Then he rapped hard on the roof of the carriage. Alice heard the coachman call to the horse and they stopped suddenly, the well-sprung vehicle bouncing gently. She watched as her companion flicked the catch on the leather case and opened it. Nestled in a pink satin lining was what looked like a steel tube. He lifted it out, removed a long needle lying beside it and fastened them together. He placed the instrument on the seat and pulled the cork out of the vial.

"What's that?"

"Let's call it the Milk of Paradise."

He plunged the syringe into the vial and drew up the brownish-coloured liquid. "Roll up your sleeve, Alice, and I will make you happier than you've ever been."

She shook her head. "Sod off. I've heard of that stuff. Sends you batchy."

"No, it doesn't, not if used wisely. It's the nectar of the gods."

"That so? Let me see you do it, then."

"I will. But ladies first. Here, hold out your arm."

He caught her by the wrist with his free hand but she knocked him away. "No. I don't want to."

The syringe fell to the floor. The needle broke in half and the brown fluid spread on the beige matting. The man

yelped.

"Damn you! You shouldn't have done that. Heaven is costly."

Alice saw his rage, saw the intent. Fear surged through her body, every nerve sensing the danger.

Before he could stop her, she pushed down the handle and thrust open the door and half fell, half rolled to the ground. Desperately, she scrambled to her feet, oblivious to the sharp ice beneath her unshod feet. They were on a desolate strip of shore. She could see the outline of the distillery to the west but it was too far away. Even if she screamed, she knew nobody would hear her. She began to run, not realizing she was heading out on the frozen lake.

The man leaned out of the carriage. "Stop her!" he shouted to the coachman. The order was unnecessary. Jack understood the situation immediately and leaped down from his seat and plunged after the fleeing woman. Even in his heavy cape, he caught up with her easily.

"Hey, wait. Where're you going?"

She turned, gasping, "He's a sodding lunatic ..."

"Don't be silly, course he's not. Come on, you'll catch your death."

Alice looked over his shoulder and for the first time she could see the carriage completely. The moon was full and gleaming on the snow. It was easy to make out a burgundy chassis. The grey horse shook his bridle and pawed at the ground.

"My God, it's the same bloody carriage. It was you ... you're the ones who picked up the girl ..."

She saw the expression on the man's face but before she could move, he caught her shoulder with one hand, twisted her around and slipped a rope noose around her throat. Alice toppled backwards as he pulled tighter.

Chapter Twelve

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 14

JOE SEATON GOT OUT OF BED IN A HURRY. He'd forgotten to pull down the alarm lever on his clock and had slept an hour longer than he should have. The window was already grey with the coming of dawn. He pulled on his trousers, lit his lantern and, rubbing hard at his head to wake himself up, clambered down the ladder to the stable. The horse whinnied softly in welcome and thrust his head over the gate of the loose box. Joe offered him the dried apple he'd pinched from the kitchen the night before, and Silver took it delicately between his big yellow teeth and ground it to pulp. Joe stroked the soft upper lip with its stiff whiskers and the horse nuzzled into his hand in the hope of finding more apples.

"That's yer lot, greedy guts," Joe said affectionately. "Come on, move over. I'm late. They'll be on at me good if I don't get cracking." He pushed the animal aside and went into the box, where he forked some fresh hay from the bale into the feeding trough. Silver was a young horse but sweet-natured and biddable, and Joe was grateful for that. The big Morgan on the farm where he'd first lived in Canada was ornery and unpredictable. He'd landed such a kick on Joe's thigh once he'd near broken the bone. "'Twas yer own fault," said the farmer and cuffed the boy for good measure.

He shivered even though this part of the stable was warm. There was an oil heater in the corner, kept on a low burn, and the horse's body heat helped. Joe's room was up above in the loft. There was only a single layer of wood between it

and the elements, and the cracks were so bad, snow sifted in at the corner.

He left Silver to his hay and climbed back up the ladder. The frost on the window shone like silver filigree as the winter sun grew stronger. He put his candle on the wooden dresser, reached under his narrow bed and hauled out the tin strongbox that had come with him from England three years earlier. That, a set of wool underwear and his navy-blue suit were all that remained of his original endowment from Dr. Barnardo's Home. The suit was small for him now. His wrists protruded from the cuffs of the jacket and he was ashamed to wear it. The sturdy boots had gone too, traded to another boy at the Fegan Boys' Distributing Home for a book now stored safely at the bottom of the box.

He lifted the lid. Inside was his scanty clothing, one-piece flannel underwear, two jerseys, a flannel shirt, all neatly folded as he had been taught. Underneath everything was the precious book, *A Handbook of Physiology and Phrenology*. He took it out and laid it aside carefully on the bed, giving it a little pat as if it were a live creature. Although there were a lot of words he couldn't understand, he'd been well schooled in basic reading in the orphanage, and he studied the thin volume at every opportunity. He'd even shown it to Therese and they'd looked at the illustrations together, giggling as they determined that the high bony forehead of Edith Foy was a sign of excessive pride and John Foy's bibativeness, his fondness for liquids, as the book called it, could be clearly seen above his prominent zygomatic arch.

In the far corner of the box, tucked beneath the jersey, was a twist of newspaper which he unfolded. Inside was his hoard of treasures, a gold cufflink, part of a broken onyx earbob, some coins, including two shilling pieces he'd once found on a London street, and a small wooden crucifix. He removed this reverently.

When he first knew that Therese was a Roman Catholic he was afraid. At the Home the word "Romanist" always sat in the same sentence as "wicked" or, at best, "misguided." Once one of the bigger youths had discovered a new boy clutching a rosary, and a group of residents soon gathered, whispering together, solemn and afraid as if they had found the Devil himself in the cupboard. They informed the warden and the poor newcomer was sent away. "To his own kind," said the supervisor. But the incident had shaken everyone and special prayers were offered for the soul of the depraved departed.

Therese was always unobtrusive in her observance, but he'd seen her touching the glass beads on her rosary, muttering in a strange language. Then she'd kiss the little wooden cross that hung from the necklace. She'd shown it to him, the seminaked body of Jesus Christ, arms outstretched, head drooping. The agony of that tiny figure had fascinated Joe.

He propped the crucifix against the candlestick, then dropped to his knees on the hard floor. He'd seen Therese cross herself and he imitated her as best he could, fluttering his hand across his chest. He bent his head in prayer, saying out loud the only Latin he had gleaned.

"Ar vay Maria, Duminee nose tree."

There was no one to hear and make a mockery of him, and he repeated these words over and over.

It was in early December that he'd first crept into her room. There was a severe frost that night and the cold had bitten through his blanket until he woke shivering, unable to sleep. Normally he would have gone down to the stable and burrowed into the pile of straw beside Silver, but he was afraid to. He'd seen two large brown rats vanishing down the drain in the centre of the stable, and then he truly hated. He knew what they were capable of. This particular

evening he and Therese were seated at the kitchen table, snug against the wind souging at the windows. The Foys were on a rare evening out and Joe had basked in the warmth and peace of their absence, and talking what was, for him, "a blue streak," as Tess put it. She soon pried out of him what sort of conditions he was living in.

"You can come to sleep in my bed, if it pleases you," she whispered. "But we mustn't let anyone know."

She hadn't needed to say that. He was quite aware what would happen if they were discovered. So beginning then, on the coldest nights, he climbed through the back window of the house and tiptoed up the back stairs to her room. Infrequently at first, not trusting, only when the cold was unbearable. But always she welcomed him. Always until a week ago. When he came this night she pushed him away like an unwelcome dog and he fell to the floor. Seeing his face, she jumped down and knelt beside him, kissing his cheeks and hands.

"Forgive me, *mon ami*. I regret."

She got back into bed, lifted the counterpane and let him climb into the warm cocoon.

"You can place your head here if you wish," she said and guided him to the soft pillow of her young breasts. The feeling was so sweet it made him dizzy and he swelled into uncomfortable manhood, his groin throbbing. Memories of the coarse jokes he'd heard at the Home came to his mind but he pushed them away. He could not bear anything to sully the purity of his love.

"You cannot come any more," she whispered, her breath warm on his face. But she would not say why, and when he crept away early that morning before it was light, his body hurt as if he had been beaten.

If he had been the one to find her lying in the snow, he would have lain beside her and brought her back to life with his own heat.

He shifted. His knees were aching and his fingers had gone numb with cold. The little room was silent. No voice of God had spoken. No Devil either, for that matter. He thought the Christ stretched out on the cross looked at him with pity, but there was no miracle forthcoming. Stiffly, he got to his feet. He had no idea how long he had been on his knees, but he knew it must be time to prepare the horse and carriage for Dr. Rhodes.

Next to the trapdoor was a washstand where his pitcher and bowl stood. There was a bar of soap in a dish and a razor. Soon after he had arrived, Foy made a scornful remark about the downy hair on his lip and chin, and Joe had immediately purchased a razor and tried to make sure he would never offend again.

He rolled up the sleeve of his jersey, exposing his forearm. A round white scar by the base of his thumb was testimony to his first placement in Elmvale. He'd tried to defend himself against the farmer's belt and the buckle had ripped out a piece of flesh on his wrist.

He picked up the razor in his right hand and drew it firmly down his arm.

A red mark, thin as a pencil stroke, appeared instantly. He clenched his teeth but tears sprang involuntarily to his eyes. He waited a moment, then cut himself again, deeper this time. Then he dropped the bloody razor into the bowl of water, breaking the skin of ice into delicate shards. The water turned pink.

He pulled down his sleeve. Beads of sweat had broken out on his temples and he felt faint. However, the burning pain in his arm was a relief, as if he had transposed the grief that threatened to drive him mad.

Dark plumes of smoke, slow and lazy in the cold air, hung over the tall stacks at the distillery. The old lunatic who lived at the edge of the lake to the east used the smoke as a

barometer to the mood of God. If the clouds were white and scattered it meant God was happy, and out-of-doors would be pleasant. If the smoke was dark and still, as it was this morning against the flesh-coloured dawn, God was angry and His breath would burn on your face. It was a time to be careful not to offend Him.

So it was with uneasiness he set out to forage for firewood and debris along the shore.

He saw what looked like a bundle of clothes some yards out on the frozen lake. When he went to investigate, he discovered the body.

He circled her once, twice, then poked her gingerly with his stick. In the night, snow had drifted across her body, and beneath that cold blanket she lay with her arms outstretched, legs bent beneath her. Even the confused mind of the lunatic registered that something was terribly wrong, and with a moan of fear he stumbled back over the frozen, rutted ground to the hut of his nearest neighbour. The widow, Maria Jenkins, was deaf and suspicious and he had difficulty rousing her. When she finally opened her door, he was gesticulating wildly, swaying from one foot to the other like a frightened pigeon. She understood him to say that an angel had fallen from the sky.

Later, when Murdoch saw Alice's face, he found it hard to fathom why the old man would have said such a thing.

Donalda had been awake for almost an hour but she lay in her warm bed, not wanting to get up. She had slept badly again, with a terrifying dream of drowning that woke her over and over as if she were rising and falling to the surface of the sea. Finally she willed herself to stay awake. She heard Cyril's door open and close and she slowly got out of bed. She couldn't bear the thought of having breakfast alone, and even her husband's company was preferable. Owen, she knew, wouldn't be up until nine at least, and she

never liked to wake him unnecessarily. She slipped on her satin wrapper and went downstairs.

The breakfast room was filled with sun and she could see that the sky was a brilliant, cloudless blue. In the warm room it was as if this were summer and not another cold February morning.

Cyril was seated in the window nook, reading the newspaper, and as she entered he looked up in surprise.

"Donalda, what gets you up so early?"

"I was awake and decided that I was getting tired of seeing only the four walls of my bedroom. It is much more pleasant down here."

"There is no reason you shouldn't take your breakfast here all the time."

"You're quite right. After all, I could eat alone in either place, couldn't I?"

"Please, I-let's not start a quarrel. You're quite aware of my habits. You have chosen not to accommodate yourself to them."

She moved restlessly over to the sideboard. She didn't want to argue with him this morning. She tugged at the bellpull. She could sense Cyril observing her warily and tried to be more pleasant.

"Has anyone come forward with information about Theresa?"

"There is no more m-mention. Shepcote is offering a reward, so that might d-do it."

"Cyril, I -"

There was a tap at the door and John Foy came in.

"I'd like my breakfast served here this morning, Foy."

"Yes, madam. Mrs. Foy was just preparing it. It won't be a moment."

Donalda thought the butler looked as grey as old dishwater and wondered if he was sick.

"May I pour your tea, madam?"

She nodded. Foy went to the sideboard, removed the cozy from the teapot and poured the strong amber tea into a fresh cup. As he handed it to her, she could see his unsteadiness.

"Are you ill, Foy?"

"Thank you, no, madam. Just a touch of my stomach again."

His eyes met hers and for a moment there was no gulf between mistress and servant. She saw the fear reflected in his liverish eyes but, a second before that, utter dislike. Then he blinked and the expression disappeared as if the aperture of a camera had closed. Her butler stood before her, steady and impassive.

"I'll bring some more hot water and some toast, madam," he said and left, carrying the jug.

Donalda took her teacup to the table. She wondered if she should mention Foy to Cyril, but she was overwhelmed with inertia. She felt almost as if she were still in her dream, trying to move underwater. She sipped at the hot, sweet tea and regarded her husband. The bright light was not kind. It accentuated the grey-ness of his beard and the thinning hair at his temples. He looked drawn and tired. She realized he wasn't reading but had gone into a reverie.

"A penny for your thoughts, Cyril."

"What?"

"You were lost in thought. I offered you a penny."

For once, he didn't respond with irritation. He smiled slightly. "I'm afraid even a farthing would be overvalue."

"Do you realize we have hardly set eyes on each other since Monday evening?"

"That so? Hmm, I s-suppose you're right. I have been devilishly busy." He started to fold the newspaper. "And I still am. I must be off."

If he had shown the slightest inclination to stay and talk to her, to share in any way what he was so busy with, Donalda, in her loneliness, would have remained softened towards

him. However, his haste to leave stung her and determined her resolve.

"Cyril, I intend to return to England."

He stared at her. "For a holiday?"

"No, I want to go back permanently."

"This seems a sudden decision, Donaldalda."

"Not really. I've been contemplating it for a long time but I haven't had the courage to follow through."

"I see."

He regarded her bleakly, not making any attempt to dissuade her or question her decision. She continued, trying to hold her bitterness in check.

"Theresa's death decided me. She was such a young girl to lose all promise of a life. She would have liked children and a family, I know that. Since it happened I have been scrutinising myself, and I don't particularly like what I see."

"How so, D-Donaldalda?"

"There is something wrong when a woman of my age takes most of her comfort from a servant."

"You're talking like this because you are still upset. What happened was dreadfully shocking to all of us -"

"Was it? Well, regardless, that event has forced my hand."

"What about Owen?"

"I will suggest that he transfer to Guy's Hospital. It is far superior, anyway. I am confident he and Harriet will make a match, and we could leave after the wedding. Don't worry, we will devise some story to put abroad."

"I am not con-con - er, concerned about that."

"Aren't you? You must have changed, then, in the last week. Public opinion has always seemed to matter a great deal to you." She met his eyes. "I have kept your secret, Cyril, and because of Owen I remained, living this pretext. I can do so no longer. Oh, don't look so alarmed, I'm not going to put a notice in the newspaper. I simply would like to return to my homeland. After a while perhaps we could divorce. I would like the opportunity to live the rest of my

life with some honesty.” She paused and her voice was low. “I am not that old, after all. It is not inconceivable that I could find love again.”

To her surprise, Cyril put his head in his hands, his voice muffled so that she almost didn’t catch what he said.

“I am so sorry, Donalda.”

When Foy returned to the kitchen, his wife was busy chopping vegetables for the midday meal. Beef stew was on for today.

“She wants her toast.”

“It’s ready, just needs buttering.”

“Shall I do it?”

“I haven’t got four pair of hands, have I?”

He took the toast off the fork and slathered butter on one side.

“That’s too much,” Edith snapped. “You know she likes it spread thin.”

His head was throbbing and he was tempted to snarl back at her, but he knew that would precipitate a full-scale war and he wasn’t up to it. He scraped off some of the butter, licking at the knife. Edith was slicing at some carrots with an unpleasant vigour.

“She’s in a blue mood this morning,” he said.

“Has a right to be, if you ask me. Mind you, if I were in her shoes, I wouldn’t be blue, I’d be bloody red.”

“How’d you mean?”

“Him. Coming in at all hours of the night.”

“Dr. Rhodes?”

“That’s what I said.”

“Was he in late last night?”

Edith demolished a parsnip and dropped the slices into the pot of water on the stove. “Late! You might just as well say it was early. Two o’clock in the morning. I heard him knocking up Joe to put the carriage away.”

"I didn't hear a thing."

"No, you wouldn't have, would you?"

Foy winced but didn't pursue the matter. "I suppose he was with one of his patients, then?"

"Ha! Funny how he always has extra work to do Saturdays and Wednesdays. Very convenient."

Her husband was befuddled but had the feeling that it was better to remain quiet. Edith put a hunk of raw meat on the cutting board and began slicing it into chunks.

"Look at the fat on this. And I asked for prime. That man is a cheat if ever I saw one."

"The butcher?"

She gave him a withering look. "Men!"

Foy arranged the toast in the silver rack the way Donald liked it.

Edith continued. "Good thing for Master Owen his father didn't throw the bolt or we'd have had another incident like Saturday in reverse."

"Was he out too?"

"Yes. Came crawling back just after the doctor."

Foy had no real affection for Owen but he felt compelled to counter Edith. "He's a young fellow. Probably out sowing a few wild oats while he can."

Edith hacked the piece of meat in two.

"Men!"

Owen Rhodes knew that he should be getting dressed if he was going to be at his lecture on time, but every movement seemed an effort. He stared into his wardrobe, unable to decide what suit to wear. Courtney had shown up yesterday in a navy mariner's sweater. He said it was practical, considering what they had to do all day. The demonstrator had been furious and would have dismissed him if it had been anyone else. However, Courtney's father and grandfather were both directors of the college, so he got

away with it. Owen didn't own a mariner's sweater, but he could wear his brown bicycle jersey. Yesterday he'd got blood on his cuffs when he was doing the dissection and, sickened, threw the shirt away.

A female cadaver the colour of lard was ready for them on the table. An old woman, by the look of the wasted limbs and the grey hair, but the information card said she was forty-five, only two years older than his own mother. Illness and poverty had aged her like all the others. Dr. Cavin, the demonstrator, was excited. For the first time the class had the opportunity to see an example of galloping consumption first-hand. Its "ravages," was the word he used. Owen had tried to hover behind his friend McDonough so that his view of the cutting was restricted, but Cavin made him step forward. He pretended to do it in a teasing fashion but Owen could feel the malice. The demonstrator didn't like him and seized every opportunity to goad him.

Cavin pushed aside the flaccid breast, the skin stretched and marked from the suckling of many children, then sliced through the sternum and moved aside the flesh to reveal the ribs, reddened with blood. "Take those pliers and open the ribs for me, Rhodes."

Owen clenched his teeth, determined not to retch or, worse, faint like a green girl. The woman was dead. He didn't know her name or her circumstances. He didn't know who grieved for her, if any did. He pried apart the bones of the rib cage, and Cavin reached in with his snips and severed the arteries and venous system of the right lung. He tugged and the organ came out with a sucking sound as if it were in mud. The blood ran over Owen's fingers and he bit down hard so as not to gag. He was dimly aware that Hugh had stepped to the rear of the group. All the students were quiet.

“See the holes that the bacillus had made? She must have gone fast,” said Cavin. He held the soggy mass aloft, admiring it. The woman’s chest gaped open, empty. “We’ll see if there are traces in the intestines, and the bones. Gentlemen, work in pairs. Each take a limb. You have one hour.”

There were no traces of disease in the humerus that lay white in its bed of red muscle, but Owen and his partner found that the thoracic vertebrae were riddled with it, the bone crumpling to the touch. Feverell termed the cadaver “TB Tilly,” and all the students laughed. They never knew what her name was because it wasn’t on the card.

Owen decided on his navy merino suit and pulled off his nightshirt. The wardrobe mirror reflected back his pale, naked body. For a moment he stared at his own image, assessing the slim shoulders and hips. He often wished he was taller and heavier, not so much like his father. Tentatively, he touched his finger to his lips. He could still feel the kiss, the soft tongue inserting itself between his lips. He took the sleeve of his nightshirt, spat on it to moisten it and rubbed hard across his mouth until his mouth burned.

Chapter Thirteen

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 14

THE WIDOW JENKINS HAD ROUSED a neighbour to go for help. The man, Jimmy Gallagher, who was not young, ran as fast as he could up the laneway to Mill Street. Excitement gave him strength as he slipped and staggered through the deep snow, but by the time he reached Parliament his chest was close to bursting and he had to stop for breath. A man in a bread wagon was plodding by and, realizing he knew him, Gallagher ran out in front of the horse and stopped him. Through gasps he related what had happened, but Taylor wasn't too willing to give him a ride to the police station.

"Rosie isn't so spry any more and I'm not a-going to kill my horse for no strange Jezebel."

"You don't know the poor dead woman was one such thing," said Gallagher.

"Sure she was. Why'd she get herself killed down by the lake, else? Besides, I have my deliveries to make."

"Jesus, Mary and Joseph, they'll wait an hour, surely?"

"Ha! And who'll thank me if I lose my job?"

However, he finally conceded. Gallagher climbed up beside him, and Rosie was persuaded to canter up Parliament to the station. Crabtree had just arrived for his shift and Murdoch was in the orderly room brewing himself a breakfast tea. As soon as the Irishman spit out his story, Murdoch commandeered the police ambulance from the adjoining stables and they galloped off to the lake, Gallagher hanging on to his hat inside the wagon. He hadn't seen so much excitement in many a long day.

Crabtree pulled up the panting horses at the end of the laneway within sight of the ice-pitted shore. The area was deserted. Either from fear or indifference, nobody else had emerged from the ramshackle huts. Only Mrs. Jenkins and the lunatic were there waiting. She was seated on a rock by the marge and had wrapped herself in a voluminous grey shawl. The lunatic was standing beside her, swaying back and forth, muttering to himself. Murdoch walked over to the old woman.

“Mrs. Jenkins? I’m Detective Murdoch.”

She nodded. “We’ve been sitting here in the perishing cold. Thought it best to keep guard.”

“Thank you. That was very sensible. Is this the man who found the body?”

She cupped her hand to her ear. “Eh? What you say?”

He repeated the question.

“Yep, that’s him.”

“What’s his name?”

“Calls himself Zephaniah. S’not his real name but he’s probably forgot that by now. He don’t understand much.”

The old man’s white, matted hair hung down his back, and the grizzled beard reached to his waist. His head was wrapped around in a woollen turban and his stained and torn coat had once been a soldier’s greatcoat. At Murdoch’s approach, he whimpered and shrank back. He had been jailed barely a month earlier for vagrancy and responded to the police like a beaten dog responds to the sight of the stick.

“She’s out there,” said Mrs. Jenkins, pointing out to the frozen lake.

The lunatic suddenly shrieked. “I will punish the princes, saith the Lord. All the merchant people are cut down –”

“Mr. Zephaniah ...”

“A cry from the fish gate ... a great crashing from the hills ... thick darkness ...” His eyes were rolling back in his head,

spittle coming from his mouth. "Their blood shall be poured out as dust and their flesh as dung ..."

"Perhaps you could take him back to your cottage," said Murdoch. "I'll come and talk to you shortly."

"Eh?"

He yelled in her ear. Stiffly, she got to her feet and took the old man by the elbow.

"She obeyed not the voice ..."

They both shuffled off, Zephaniah still shouting.

Gallagher was hovering behind Crabtree. "D'you want me to help with the stretcher, Officer?"

"Probably, but we'll have to wait until the coroner arrives. You can tend to his carriage when he comes. Wait here for now and don't let anybody come near the area."

The old man gave him a soldierly salute and Murdoch and Crabtree set out to the body.

The sky was a brilliant blue and the lumps of ice glittered like glass in the bright sun. Here and there black branches, from bushes that had drowned in the lake before the ice came, reached upwards with desperate fingers. A trail of footprints was clearly visible in the fresh-fallen snow. Murdoch bent down. One pair of prints was wide and flat and would belong to the lunatic, who was wearing clogs; the other, smaller pair that overlapped were no doubt those of the widow Jenkins. He looked closer. Underneath those marks, the snow had earlier been brushed into wide swaths.

"Let's keep to the side," he said to his constable. A gust of wind whipped across their faces, stinging, lifting the snow into a puff of mist that shone in the air like diamond shavings. Murdoch pulled his muffler up around his nose, which was pinching against the cold.

They were about ten feet away when Murdoch realized it was Alice Black who was lying there. There was no mistaking that garish red and black striped jacket and the foolishly overdecorated hat. He felt a pang of pity as they stopped and gazed down on her.

There had been no dignity in her dying. Her brown straw hat had fallen off to the side and one of the dingy yellow feathers, broken in two, lay across her livid cheek. Her swollen tongue protruded from her mouth and the capillaries in her eyes had burst so that the sockets seemed to be swimming in blood. Murdoch knelt down and Crabtree shifted his feet nervously beside him. He wasn't used to this sort of death.

"Nasty, sir," he said.

"It is that. The rope has almost broken through the flesh, it was pulled so hard."

Murdoch found it distressing himself, but he had seen his share of bodies washed ashore. Once, a Norwegian trawler had been shipwrecked off the coast and a young blond sailor had been found jammed in the rocks. A piece of sail rope was wrapped tight about his neck, and he had looked the way Alice did.

"At least we know for sure this one didn't die from natural causes," said the constable.

Murdoch nodded. "Too true. Go back to the beach and mark any wheel tracks or prints that you find."

"What do you think she was doing out here, sir?"

"What she was doing is probably not so much the question. How'd she get here is what bothers me. Look!"

Alice was in her stocking feet and the black wool was torn at the soles. He could see lesions on the skin underneath where the ice had scraped her.

"I doubt she walked all the way from home without her boots."

He glanced over at the shore where the half-dozen huts were scattered. To the west was the Gooderham Distillery, the smoke stacks etched against the blue sky.

"I suppose she could have been gaying it in one of these cottages," said the constable.

"It's possible, but she's a long way from her own territory. I'm more inclined to think she came in a carriage. Maybe

somebody wanted a winter poke. Anyway, let's search first, then we'll start asking."

"Yes, sir." Crabtree looked down at Alice's body. "She wasn't heading anywhere that could help her."

He indicated the white expanse of lake stretching to the horizon. A flock of gulls were gathered nearby, their underbellies white as the snow, their hooked beaks yellow and cruel.

Suddenly Zephaniah shouted wildly. Gallagher saw them look over in his direction and he saluted again.

"Could it have been the madman as did her in?" asked Crabtree.

"He seems too frail to me, but I suppose we can't rule him out. What I'm wondering is whether or not this has anything to do with Therese Laporte."

"Alice was silenced, you mean, sir?"

"Possibly. On the other hand, with women like this, who knows? She just may have angered one of her customers."

Crabtree nodded and for a minute they both stared down at the dead woman, each with different thoughts. Then the constable saluted and trudged off to begin his search of the shore. Murdoch began a careful examination of the body.

Except for the lack of boots, Alice was fully dressed, drawers intact, no unexpected tears in her clothing that he could see. She was wearing brown leather gloves, old and well mended. Her jacket was undone but none of the buttons were missing or the holes ripped. Her taffeta waist was rose coloured, but he could see dark brownish spots on the bib. She had bitten deep into her lower lip and there was dried blood on her chin. The colour of her face was such that he couldn't make out any sign of bruising, and he'd have to wait for the postmortem examination to see if she had been marked anywhere else on her body.

Something gleamed in the sun, and Murdoch moved aside the jacket lapels and tugged clear a necklace of green beads. No, not that, not a necklace. The crucifix was missing

but it was easily identifiable. Gingerly, he pulled it over the rigid head and stowed it in his inside pocket.

"Mr. Murdoch! I found something, sir. Marks of a carriage. And horse dropping. Fresh."

Murdoch shouted back, "Put in a marker. Watch you don't spoil anything." He waited while the constable edged away cautiously and went to a bush to break off a wand.

Murdoch too stepped away from the corpse. There didn't seem to be much more to be gained here. Whoever had killed Alice had taken care to obliterate their footprints, and all around the body the snow had been brushed smooth.

He made the sign of the cross above Alice's head.

"May God have mercy on your soul, Alice Black," he said.

"So you didn't believe this man was a sailor?" Murdoch asked Bernadette. Her face was taut and pale but she'd shed no tears. Murdoch was sitting with her in the kitchen of the lodging house.

"I knew he wasn't. His hands was as soft as a baby's backside. I didn't like the look of him." She stopped and stared into space for a moment. "I told her not to go with him but she wouldn't listen. When she didn't come home, I knew something bad had happened. I dreamt of spiders, see. They were running up the walls. It's a sure sign that you're going to hear of a death." She stood up and went over to the stove. "Would you like a cuppa?" She spooned tea leaves into a cracked pot, added a ladle or two of boiling water and left it to steep.

Murdoch took out his notebook. "I'll go to the O'Neil, of course, and see if anybody knew this fellow, but I'd better get the names of all the men who've had anything to do with Alice in the last while. Did she ever go down to Mill Street that you know of?"

Ettie shook her head. "Never. She didn't need to. The men she knew were all regulars."

"Did she meet them here?"

"Usually at their lodgings or in the upstairs rooms of the hotel."

She had completely dropped the fiction that Alice made her living mending gloves. "You're not going to give Jimmy a hard time about that, are you?"

Legally, the hotel keeper should have been charged with keeping a house of ill repute.

"Not at the moment."

He could see her shoulders lower in relief. When he did confront the hotel keeper, it might mean the end of Ettie's welcome there.

The teapot was still sitting on the stove untended, but she began to stir an enamel pot that was on one of the burners.

"I bought a leg of mutton yesterday. I was cooking it up for our tea. She liked mutton stew, she did."

A sort of hiccough sob came out of her throat. Murdoch expected her to break into tears. However, she simply stirred the pot more vigorously and the cries never came. He waited a moment, then reached into his pocket and took out the broken rosary.

"Alice had this around her neck. Do you know where she got it?"

Ettie turned around, and when she saw what he was holding she flinched. Her body tensed and her eyes regarded him warily.

"She found it on the street."

"When?"

"I dunno. A few days ago."

"Where exactly?"

"I dunno. Near the O'Neil, I think she said."

Murdoch stared at her but she glanced away and concentrated on the pot again. "Did you know it's a rosary?"

"What's that?"

"People who are Roman Catholics use them to say prayers. Each bead marks a prayer. It probably belonged to

Therese Laporte."

"God, you're not going to start up again, are you?"

"How did Alice come to have it?"

"Bleeding hell, you've got a short memory. I just told you. She found it. I suppose that girl must have dropped it."

Murdoch got up, went over to her and grasped her by the shoulder, forcing her to face him. He could feel the bone beneath the thin cloth of her wrapper.

"Ettie, listen to me. Alice has been murdered. Brutally. Therese Laporte died in a strange, unnatural way. It is possible the two deaths are connected."

She moved away from his touch as if his hand was hot. "How could they be?"

"You tell me. A strange man shows up at the hotel. He takes off with Alice and next thing, she's dead. Maybe the man knew Therese. She was expecting, after all. Maybe it was him as got her that way and he didn't want anyone to know. Maybe Alice saw something when she was coming home on Saturday night."

She winced again, almost imperceptibly. "Of course she didn't."

"Maybe she found something incriminating on the body when she stripped it -"

"Oh God, stuff it, will ya."

"Come on, Ettie, this rosary belonged to Therese Laporte and it ended up around Alice Black's neck. Just like those clothes ended up in your outhouse. Tell me the truth, for God's sake."

He was shouting at her in his frustration, but she became stubborn and sullen.

"How many times have I got to sodding well say it? Are you deaf or just plain stupid? Alice found the bloody necklace."

He took a deep breath, trying to calm down. Yelling at her wasn't helping. "There is a crucifix that hangs from a rosary. Do you know what that is?"

"No."

"It's a cross with the figure of Jesus Christ on it. This one might have been done in silver or brass. Did you see it?"

She shook her head emphatically. "No."

"You're sure?"

"I'm telling you, the necklace was just like it is now. No Jesus."

"Could Alice have removed the crucifix and put it somewhere else?"

"No."

"How can you be so certain? Could be that she just didn't tell you. She might have thought you would want to take it."

"Sod off. We were like sisters. I wouldn't take anything of hers. Nor her either. I tell you there weren't no bloody cross on that thing."

He tried an abrupt shift. "Did Alice mention to you that she had seen Therese before she died?"

There was a quick flicker of doubt across her face. "What are you getting at?"

"The girl died so close to here. Alice said she was coming home about ten o'clock Saturday night. Perhaps she saw her? Maybe even talked to her? Did she?"

Ettie shook her head.

"Look, Ettie, I am giving you fair warning. If I'm thinking that you and Alice were thick as thieves, the murderer is probably doing the same. You could be in danger."

"Go on," she scoffed. "I can look after myself."

"That's what you said about Alice, and -"

At that moment the curtain to the kitchen was pulled back and Samuel Quinn came in, all bundled up in greatcoat and cloth cap, a long muffler wrapped around his neck. Princess was close at his heels, and on a thick leather leash was another dog. It was a big heavy creature, white with brown patches. The skull was wide, set off with long floppy ears, and the eyes were doleful. Princess launched into a few yelps of pleasure at the sight of Ettie, while the other dog

gave one deep-throated bark and sat down, drooling copiously. Quinn saw Murdoch and stopped abruptly in the doorway.

"Er, sorry. Didn't know you ... er ..."

Ettie bent down, allowing the bitch to cover her face with enthusiastic licks. "Good girl. Did you miss me?"

Murdoch raised his voice. "Can you stay a minute, Mr. Quinn?"

Quinn looked uneasy. "I'm just off to work, Sergeant, er ...?"

Ettie silenced Princess by putting down some crusts of bread and patted the second dog on its wide forehead.

"Big old bastard, aren't you? Where'd you come from?"

"My pal's," said Quinn to Murdoch. "Taking care of him for a couple of days."

"Another friend on his honeymoon?"

"What?"

"You said the last dog you were taking care of, the man was on his wedding trip."

"Oh, right. Just forgot for a minute."

Quinn began to twist both ends of his full moustache.

"What's this one's name?" asked Murdoch.

"Titch. His name's Titch."

The enormous dog licked its lips, scattering saliva on the floor.

"What's up?" Quinn asked.

Still stroking the dog, Ettie said, "Alice has been murdered, Sam."

"What!"

"That's why he's here."

"When? Murdered ...?"

"Her body was found this morning," Murdoch said. "Over by the Gooderham Distillery."

"What was she doing down there?"

"We don't know as yet. Any ideas?"

"What? No, er, no. Tarnation, I'm sorry, Ettie. The Lord love me, I don't know what to say."

"Were you at the John O'Neil last evening?" Murdoch asked him.

"I was that."

"Did you know the man who Alice left with? The sailor? He was calling himself Jack."

"Not me. Never seen him before. Why d'you ask? Was he the one did her in?"

"Let's say he must have been one of the last people to see her alive. Ettie says she didn't like the look of him. Was that your opinion?"

"Can't say as I had an opinion to speak of. He seemed a quiet sort of bloke, really. He was only at the table for a short bit, then they left."

"Can you give me a description of the man?"

"Sure. He was fairish, short hair, a beat-up sort of face like you'd expect for an outdoor fellow."

"He was ugly as the Devil's arse, if you ask me," interrupted Ettie. "Eyes like dead fish."

"One thing I can tell you, Mr. Murdoch," added Quinn, "he had some nobby togs. Best worsted, I'd say, wouldn't you, Ettie?"

She nodded. "Another reason to believe he weren't no Tar. Where'd he get the darby to buy clothes like that?"

Murdoch turned to Quinn. "Where were you last night? After you left the O'Neil?"

"Me? The usual." His fingers kept going at the moustache. "I was working all last night. I went in at eleven. Just got off this morning. You can ask them."

"Sod it, the tea will be like mud," said Ettie. She brought the teapot to the table and plonked down three chipped mugs. Unasked, she poured the strong black brew for Quinn as well. She sat down and he came over and placed his hand on her arm.

"I'm terrible sorry, Ettie," he said again. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

She shrugged. "Nothing to be done, is there? She's gone." Suddenly she slammed down her mug, splashing hot tea on her hand. She put her scalded fingers to her mouth. "Sod it, sod it," she said. With her unburnt fist she started to pound on the table. "Sod it, sod it," she kept repeating.

Mrs. Kitchen added a spoonful of sugar to the tea and handed Murdoch the cup and saucer. He took a cautious sip. "Wonderful, Mrs. K. As usual." She beamed. Making his tea exactly how he liked it was a source of delight for her.

"Ready for your tonic, Arthur?" she asked her husband.

"Now?"

"You've only had seven. We should try to get in at least two more tonight."

There was a jug on the sideboard and beside it a bowl of eggs. She poured thick cream from the jug into a glass, cracked one of the eggs into it and gave them a thorough stir. She brought the yellowish mixture to her husband, who downed it in a couple of gulps and wiped his lips with gusto on the back of his sleeve.

"Arthur," she protested, "use your handkerchief. Where were you brought up?"

Murdoch grinned. "I'm tempted to make up a few of those myself."

"You should. Good for you. I tell you I can feel the difference. In two days."

The cheery tone sounded false, not quite masking the underlying desperation. Arthur Kitchen had lived for a long time now with ever increasing debility and the certainty of a painful death. Murdoch fervently hoped this new treatment would work.

As usual they were sitting underneath their quilts and he was relating the events of the day. Beatrice had lit the fire

for his benefit but he'd insisted on leaving the window open as Arthur's fever was high tonight.

Beatrice sat down again. She had begun to decorate another box and the smell of glue and lacquer was thick and sweet in the air.

"What's that you're doing, Mrs. K.?"

She daubed some black lacquer onto one of her shells and surveyed it critically. "Mrs. Lewis said there was a call for mourning boxes, so I'm doing a black one for her. I'll see if this works. The lacquer doesn't stick too well ... Go on, Mr. Murdoch."

"Not much more to say, really. Nobody seems to have known the man Alice left the hotel with." He pulled up the sleeve of his cardigan to demonstrate. "He has a tattoo around his wrist and forearm. A snake. Not hard to recognize, but every last man of them says they never saw him before."

"They that put their hands in evil will perish by evil." Beatrice's metaphor was a little confused, but her expression wasn't. Murdoch drank some more tea. He knew how kindhearted a woman Mrs. K. actually was, but when it came to certain kinds of immorality she knew no compromise. She hadn't evinced any pity for Alice Black.

"We also questioned everybody within a mile radius of the beach, but same story. Nobody saw anything."

"Are they to be believed?" asked Arthur.

Murdoch nodded. "I'd say yes. Her friend, Ettie, swears Alice didn't know anybody in that neighbourhood and had never been there. It's more likely she was taken to the beach in a carriage. Her jacket was partially unbuttoned and Ettie says she was wearing a shawl, but that's nowhere to be found and neither are her boots."

Murdoch stared into the fire. The dancing flames were making no headway against the cold coming in from the window, but they were soothing to watch. Tomorrow he was

going to go to the Rhodeses' house and show them the rosary. There'd been too much to do today.

"How was himself?" asked Arthur.

"A real Cossack. He kept going on about shirking. I wanted to tell him to feel my frozen feet."

Arthur laughed. "In a tender spot, I hope?"

"Arthur!" exclaimed his wife, but she smiled too.

"Exactly. He's pushing me to arrest the lunatic but we've got nothing whatever to go on except the fact that the old man found the body. Unfortunately he doesn't help matters by not answering questions. He just keeps yelling Scripture."

Beatrice paused for a moment in her arranging of the shells. "My mother's cousin's son used to do that. Not Scripture but nursery rhymes. Poor fellow got knocked down by a runaway horse when he was a boy, and it damaged his mind. He was never the same after that. No matter what you said to him, he'd rattle off a nursery rhyme. Nobody could make it out at first, but his mother was good with him and she finally figured he was speaking in riddles. The dear child didn't live long. God in His mercy saw fit to take him to Heaven when he was only twelve."

"What do you mean he was speaking in riddles?"

"Well, for instance, if she said, 'Henry, what do you want for your tea?' he'd answer, 'Georgie porgie.' What he meant was that he'd like some pudding. Or if he'd say, 'Mittens,' it meant bread and jam."

Arthur snorted. "Good thing his mother understood him. If it were up to me the fellow would've starved to death."

"If the old man is speaking in code, I don't have the foggiest notion what it is," said Murdoch. "He's telling me we're all damned and will get our punishment, and that seems pretty straightforward to me." He yawned. "Well, it's up the wooden hill for me. I have an early start again."

Arthur said, "I almost forgot, Will. Do you remember you was asking about a little dog, a Pekingese –"

"Or a King Charles," interrupted Beatrice.

"It was a Peke, Mother. Something rang a bell so I looked at some of the back issues of the *News*. Listen to this. It was in Saturday's paper." He opened one of the newspapers that was beside him and read.

LOST DOG . My dog vanished on Friday, while on his regular walk in the vicinity of Church and Queen. He is a purebred Pekingese. Light beige, large eyes. Answers to Bartholomew. Generous reward for information to his return. Contact Mrs. Shaw of Melita Ave.

"I'll make a note of that. By the way, what kind of dog is large as a pony, white and brown with long droopy ears and eyes like this?" He pulled down the lower lids of his eyes, exposing the red.

"Oh, that's a Newfoundland, for sure. Lovely dogs they are, but they drool a lot."

"That sounds right. If you come across any other notice in the paper concerning a dog like that, let me know."

Arthur grinned in pleasure. "I certainly will. They're valuable dogs, they are."

"I don't understand," said Beatrice.

"I have a suspicion Mr. Quinn is up to no good when it comes to canines," said Murdoch.

"He has a dog of his own, didn't you say?" remarked Arthur.

"That's right, a noisy hound. Makes a heck of a row all the time."

"Must be a female."

"Arthur! What a thing to say."

"No, no, Mother, what I mean is the fellow's probably using the old trick."

"What's that?" asked Beatrice.

"You want to pinch a dog and hold it for the reward, all you have to do is wait until it's let off its leash, then parade your bitch in front of it. At certain times, she's, er, irresistible. Off runs dog with only one thing on his mind,

and the owner is left wringing his hands, ready to pay up to the kind rescuer of dear Marmalade or whatever he's called."

Murdoch laughed. "You've got it, Arthur. On the other hand, we police can suspect our own mothers if we're not careful. He just might have friends who trust him with their expensive dogs."

"Still, I'll keep my eyes open for other notices."

Murdoch pushed off his quilt and stood up. "I'm off. Good night to both."

He shook hands and went up to his room. He considered having a pipe but he was too tired, so he undressed quickly and got into bed, shivering as his body touched the cold sheets. Blast, he had forgotten to practise his dance steps, and he'd missed his lesson this week. He'd better do an hour tomorrow or else he'd be a disgrace to the professor at the salon.

The thought of holding a young woman in his arms made him restless again and he thumped his feather pillow into a hollow. Unbidden to his mind came the memory of a thin shoulder beneath his hand, shockingly warm to the touch. He turned over and gave his pillow another punch. Thoughts like that would get him exactly nowhere.

Chapter Fourteen

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 15

INSPECTOR BRACKENREID PUSHED ASIDE the reed strips and stepped into the detective's cubicle. Murdoch was at his desk and got to his feet.

"What can I do for you, sir?"

"Bring me up to date on this bloody maid affair. The chief constable himself has sent a telegram wanting to know what is happening."

Murdoch pulled at his moustache. If Colonel Grasett was wondering and if Brackenreid was venturing out of his own office, somebody was turning up the wicks. Probably the alderman, Godfrey Shepcote. He struck Murdoch as the kind of man who liked to find a good cause to make a noise about.

"I don't have much new to report, sir. We're still following up responses to the newspaper article, but so far nothing has opened up."

"And now we've got this other tart to worry about."

"Her name was Alice Black, sir."

"Who the sod cares? Did you get anything more out of the madman?"

"No, sir. But I doubt he's the killer. Zephaniah's an old man. I can't imagine him being able to overcome a young woman like Alice."

"Don't be too cocky about that, Murdoch. Lunatics can have the strength of ten when they need to. Anyway, it's the other business I'm more concerned about."

He nodded over at the wall, which the detective was using as a blackboard. "What've you got there?"

"It's a map of the area pertinent to the scene of the crime, sir."

"I hope that chalk will rub off."

"If it doesn't I'll personally whitewash the wall."

Brackenreid went closer. "Explain it to me, Murdoch."

"Here is where Therese's body was discovered in the St. Luke's laneway." He picked up his ruler and tapped the places as he spoke. "Right here is where the newsboy, Carrots, claims to have seen her. He was at the corner of Church and Gerrard and he says she went past him going east along Gerrard."

"Why would she be doing that? I thought she was supposed to be going home. Surely she would have been heading for the train station? That's at the bottom of Yonge Street."

"You're quite right about that, Inspector, but I think I can guess what she was doing."

In spite of himself Murdoch felt eager to show him the progress of the investigation. "The dotted line is the route I believe she took when she left Birchlea. When Carrots saw her it must have been about twenty or twenty-five minutes past nine. Jimmy Matlock, another one of the newsboys, says he saw her crossing the road at Queen and Berkeley and he also remembers her walking east. He is vague about the time but says he'd just heard St. Paul's chime the quarter hour. If we allow her twenty minutes or so to get from Carrots to Jimmy it would put the time at about a quarter to ten, give or take. She has walked south and is still going easterly -"

"So? Get on with it, Murdoch."

"Yes, sir."

Murdoch clenched his teeth to hold back his retort. He knew what Brackenreid was like when he was in one of his moods.

"Therese was a young girl in trouble, and she was French-Canadian. In times of need I think we all seek out the

familiar. What represents home to us ...” He indicated a mark on King Street. “Here is the old Methodist church. Currently, it is being used by a small settlement of French-Canadians who live nearby. I’m guessing that’s where she was going.”

He knew he was opening himself up to trouble by presenting this theory, and he regretted saying it almost as soon as the words were out of his mouth. The inspector hooted.

“Blamed thin, if you ask me, Murdoch. If you were to find me walking up Bay Street, you couldn’t assume I was going anywhere in particular. What if I’d gone that way home on a whim, for a change of scenery?”

“Not quite, sir. If I found you walking north on Bay Street, I’d assume you were going to the National Club.”

“What? Oh, I suppose so, but regardless, my point stands.”

“I’m just trying to work logically from what we know of the girl’s character and her circumstances.”

“Are they the only two sightings, two guttersnipes?”

“Yes, sir, so far, but I consider them to be reliable witnesses. They both gave a good description of the girl.”

“All right. Go on. Tell me about the rest of your artwork.”

“Here, with the blue squares, I’ve traced Owen Rhodes’s route. He left Birchlea at approximately nine o’clock to take Miss Shepcote to her home. He said he travelled across Bloor Street to Church, down to Gerrard, along Gerrard, then south on Berkeley to the Shepcote house, which is just below Queen Street. He claims he dallied there with Miss Shepcote until midnight, then went home via the same path. If in fact this was not the truth and he left Miss Shepcote earlier, he could easily have met up with Therese and taken her somewhere.”

“Doesn’t Miss Shepcote verify his alibi?”

“She does, sir, but she seemed very uncomfortable and I wasn’t sure she was telling the truth.”

"Don't be ridiculous, Murdoch. She is a well-brought-up young woman. She was probably shy about the fact they were unchaperoned at that hour. Besides, why should she lie?"

"To give young Rhodes an alibi."

He waited for Brackenreid to comment, but he merely grunted and pointed to the map.

"The circles are Dr. Rhodes, I presume?"

"Mr. Shepcote and Dr. Rhodes, actually. The two of them left Birchlea shortly after nine and the doctor was dropped off at his consulting chambers at Church and Carlton. He says he was working on a report for some medical journal until one o'clock. He likes the quiet. Then he walked part of the way home until he found a cab. I've put Constable Wicken onto collecting all the cab driver's dockets for the past week, so we should be able to verify that part of the doctor's statement at least. However, we have only Rhodes's word that he stayed late in his office. He could have had a rendezvous with Therese. She was alone when Jimmy saw her, but if the doctor was walking quickly he could have met up with her on Queen Street. Or he could have hired a carriage. He certainly can come by opium in great quantities if he needs it."

"For God's sake, Murdoch, you're snatching at straws. According to you nobody is telling the truth about anything."

"Sometimes it feels that way, sir. However, the girl's condition is not a lie. Somebody impregnated her." Murdoch indicated the wall again. "That is the journey that Mr. Shepcote's carriage took when he left Birchlea. After dropping off Rhodes, he proceeded to his club on River Street. The coachman made a point of telling me that he went via Wilton."

"What do you mean 'made a point'?"

"It seemed rather like that. I didn't ask him, he volunteered. However, that puts the alderman in the same vicinity as Therese and at about the same time. If he had

actually gone along Queen Street he could have encountered Therese Laporte here, anywhere between Berkeley and River streets."

"Good Lord, Murdoch, you're not suggesting the alderman has anything to do with this affair."

"I'm not suggesting anything at the moment, Inspector. I'm simply trying to get straight the various movements of the parties who were in any way connected with Birchlea and the life of Therese Laporte. The steward has confirmed to one of my men that Shepcote was at the club from about a quarter past ten until midnight."

Brackenreid leaned forward, peering at the wall. "What's that?" He pointed at a small pockmark in the lower part of the map.

"That's actually a hole in the wall, but I thought I may as well use it. I've drawn a balloon around it. I meant to represent that from this point on Therese vanished into thin air."

"You're getting too fanciful for me, Murdoch."

Murdoch kept his voice as flat as possible. "Here is where I believe we're onto something, sir. Constable Wicken is a very capable young officer and he questioned every householder along Queen Street. At number four ninety-five a woman named Philips swears she was sitting at her window from nine-thirty that night until at least midnight. Her husband is a teamster and she was expecting him in from a journey at ten. Apparently one of his horses went lame and he didn't get home until late. Mrs. Philips says Therese Laporte did not pass by. She lives here, on the southwest corner, which means she would have seen anybody turning north or south on Sumach, or continuing along Queen Street."

"I don't understand."

Murdoch couldn't help pausing for a moment for effect.

"This is why I congratulate young Wicken. The woman kept going on as how no girl could have walked by that

night. Wicken realizes his questions were a bit too directive and he asks her if had she seen a vehicle, then. Why yes, she says, there were two. A farmer's wagon and a carriage. The wagon went by close on midnight going south on Sumach but the carriage was earlier, about ten o'clock, travelling east along Queen Street. Unfortunately Mrs. Philips couldn't really say what sort of carriage it was, but she thought it might be a hired one. The horse was a grey or white."

"It's hard for me to see this as useful, Murdoch. It's like catching spiderwebs."

"Spiders catch a lot of flies on those same slender lines. You see, Mrs. Philips admitted to seeing Alice Black go by. She hadn't mentioned it earlier because she knew who Alice was and that wasn't what we wanted to know. Wicken kept asking about a strange young girl. But she is positive that Alice went by after the carriage."

For the first time, Brackenreid looked interested. He touched the wall.

"The tart must have seen the Laporte girl."

"I don't see how she could have avoided it. She was home by ten and her route from the O'Neil is along Queen Street."

The inspector was silent for a moment, then he sighed. "The two deaths might be connected, then."

"Yes, sir. I've sent Wicken off to the market to see if a farmer was delivering anything late Saturday night, just to verify, but I don't really think it's important to the case. However, I'd say the carriage is."

Brackenreid glanced around the little room as if it could provide him some sustenance.

"Your zeal is commendable, Murdoch, but don't forget character. A good policeman is a good judge of character. You can draw your dots and arrows 'til Kingdom come, but you're not going to find any murderers or abductors there among these people."

"I beg to differ, sir. Palmer, Lamson and Pritchard were all doctors and young Birchall was a vicar's son." He picked up a compass from his desk. "Dr. Moffat says Therese couldn't have walked far with that much opium in her system." He stuck the point at the place where Therese's body had been found. "If she imbibed it half an hour earlier, maximum, she has to have been within this radius." He moved his pencil in a wide arc. Brackenreid snorted at the extent of the area that covered.

"You've got your work cut out for you, Murdoch."

"I know, sir, we have."

There was a discreet cough in front of the curtain. Murdoch could see the large outline of Constable Crabtree.

"Miss Bernadette Weston is here to see you, Mr. Murdoch."

"Who's she again? Name's familiar," asked Brackenreid.

"She was Alice Black's friend, Inspector."

"I'm leaving," said Brackenreid.

At the threshold he paused, holding back one of the clacking strips. "I'd like a complete written report on my desk by five o'clock this afternoon ... but you needn't bother with all that nonsense about arrows and dots. Go and talk to the Papists. She must have got friendly enough to let somebody in her drawers. I'll bet it was him who slipped her the opium."

"Yes, sir."

Privately, Murdoch couldn't see any good reason why the two things should be inevitably linked, but not knowing who had seduced Therese was an irritant. It was like trying to start a puzzle. If you could get the corner pieces down you were off and running. He grinned at himself. He didn't even know yet what picture he was trying to put together or even if all his pieces belonged in the same puzzle.

Time to give it a rest. Perhaps Ettie could offer some enlightenment. He went to fetch her.

Crabtree, at Murdoch's request, had brought them both mugs of strong, sweet tea, and Ettie sipped at hers appreciatively.

"'S good."

She was dressed in deep mourning, with a long black cheviot coat and a wide veiled hat that a widow would wear. There was a strong smell of mothballs around her, and Murdoch suspected the clothes, which were too large for her, were rented.

She glanced around the tiny cubicle and indicated his map. "What's that?"

"I've been noting everybody's whereabouts the night Therese Laporte died."

She was silent for a moment. "You're taking care about it, aren't you?"

He nodded.

"What's the medal for?"

"I won the mile bicycle race last year at the police games."

"Didn't know they had them. I thought coppers was always serious. All work and no play."

He smiled, but she wasn't joking.

"When you came yesterday, I was what you might call bowled over ..."

"That's only natural."

"You said you knew what it was like to lose somebody you loved."

"Yes, that's right."

She frowned. "Who was it, then? Your wife?"

"My fiancée. She died of the typhoid fever two years ago."

"What was she? A lady, or what?"

"She was a schoolteacher."

"Clever, then?"

"Very."

Whatever it was he said satisfied her. She put down her mug of tea.

"I don't want to spend time in the Mercy but if it means you'll get the cove that did in Alice, I'll do it –"

Murdoch stopped her. "Ettie, let's put it this way. I can guess at what happened. Alice got up to use the outhouse, saw the girl's body just opposite in the lane. Without more ado, she went over there and stole the clothes, hiding them in the outhouse. She kept the boots and the drawers and the rosary. You were asleep in your nice warm bed the whole time. Alice acted alone. Am I right?"

Ettie hesitated, staring at him warily. "Yes, I suppose so."

"Just one question. Did she confide in you afterwards? What I mean is, did she say exactly what the girl was wearing when she found her?"

"Just what you saw in the shawl."

"No jacket or gloves?"

"No. We – I mean, Alice – wondered where she'd been. She saw her earlier, you see."

Murdoch almost held his breath, as if he were approaching a deer in the forest. "Where?"

"When she was coming home from the hotel she saw the girl get into a carriage."

"Did Alice say whether she saw the driver or occupant?"

"No, the blinds were down. But she said the carriage was a reddish colour, or dark brown, and the horse was light coloured. The coachman had a black greatcoat and a tall hat on."

Murdoch stared at her, waiting, but she stared back. "Is that all?" he asked.

"That's enough, isn't it? You'll be able to find the sod."

"Ettie, do you realize how many carriages in this city fit that description?"

"No, how many?"

"Could be over a hundred or more."

"Well, that's your job. At least you know now the girl got into a carriage."

"That's true."

Ettie scowled at him. "I didn't have to come here. I thought you'd be pleased."

"I am, Ettie. I really do thank you."

"Alice thought the girl knew the person who was in the carriage."

"What made her think that?"

"Woman's intuition. She guessed the girl was from the country and that was true, wasn't it?"

"Yes. She lived down near Chatham on a farm."

"I warned Al not to get all leaky but as soon as she heard about a reward she got a gold sign in her eyes. Such a greedy gob and look where it got her."

"You think she was killed because of what she'd seen?"

"Course she was. Alice knew how to take care of herself. She wouldn't get no cully customer so aggravated he'd up and kill her. Not even that devil of a Tar. If he's the one done Alice, he's also the one who did for the young girl."

She stood up and pulled the heavy veil back over her face. "I'm off now. I've got the funeral to get ready for. You know where to find me."

She stuck out her hand to shake and he did so. She was wearing gloves and the leather precluded any sensation of warm flesh, and he was glad.

"Ettie, be careful."

"Course. I always am."

With a faint rustle from her stiff skirt and a waft of camphor, she left.

Murdoch watched the reed strips settle down to stillness.

Chapter Fifteen

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 15

CYRIL RHODES PACED AROUND his narrow consulting room. He was still deeply distressed by Donalda's announcement. Everybody would know it was a marital separation, and that could be quite detrimental to his practice. Look what happened to Charles Warden when his wife ran off with young Jarrod. On the surface there was sympathy for the cuckolded husband, but Warden's practice gradually dropped off until he was seriously considering moving out of the city. It was sheer good fortune that Clara caught *la grippe* so soon after and he was able to remarry. Even so, patients were slow to come back.

Disagreeable as the thought was, he had to admit he had been having a hard time lately making ends meet. It was expensive maintaining two establishments, and he was not as busy as he would have liked. There were stretches of time when he had nothing to do but wait for the next patient. These days, with the country going through poor economic times, fewer people were coming up the narrow stairs to his consulting room. They were no doubt seeking out physicians whose fees were lower.

He paused for a moment in front of the window and gazed down at the street. To the left he could see the slender spire of St. James's Church, sharp-etched against the drear sky. To the right and opposite was the handsome new Somerset Hotel. A ragged boy was vigorously clearing a walkway through the mound of snow at the curb in front. In spite of diligent truant officers, many boys in the city managed to avoid school, they or their parents needing their meagre

earnings to survive. This boy made it his job to carry packages, hold the carriage horses if necessary and, summer or winter, make sure that if the guests wanted to cross the road, there was no offending manure for them to step in. It was a good post and Cyril had seen him fight for it on occasion, the way wild animals will fight off other hungry intruders.

Cyril could sympathize. This stretch of Church Street from Gerrard up to Carlton was jokingly referred to by the trades as “widow’s walk.” There were seven widows living in large houses on the west side and five on the east, all of them well-to-do. He had jumped at the opportunity to rent an office plumb in the midst of these possibly lonely ladies, but it hadn’t brought him the custom he’d hoped for. Initially, they had come in droves out of curiosity, manufacturing trivial ailments in order to assess him, but that hadn’t lasted. It was his fault, he knew. He wasn’t comfortable with a certain class of women, and try as he might to prevent it, his stammer got worse in their presence. To compensate, he became aloof and impersonal. This was not a good style to have with such ladies, who all wanted to be cosseted and flattered and who expected him to spend considerable time listening to them. Over the years they had drifted away, and nowadays the majority of his patients were from the working classes. They expected their doctor to be remote and took his stutter as a sign of his superiority.

Suddenly Cyril leaned forward, adjusting his pince-nez. My God, surely that wasn’t Martha? Not here. She wouldn’t dare to come here.

A stout woman in a dark fur cape and wide hat was walking up the street opposite, her skirt lifted indecorously high above her boots. Beside her was a young girl in a bright red tam and matching coat. Quickly, he ducked back from the window and pulled down the blind, just lifting it enough to see. He groaned. It was her. The woman and her

daughter were proceeding quite slowly past his office towards Carlton Street.

He watched, breath held, as they halted at the corner. What was she doing? Surely she didn't intend to go into the hotel? The livened doorman opened the door in anticipation, but with a haughty toss of her head, the woman turned back to face the road. Cyril shrank back further but she gave no sign she had seen him. She was concentrating on the electric streetcar that was swaying down the tracks towards them. She flagged it to stop. The urchin gave one last ostentatious sweep at the snow but the woman took her daughter's hand and hurried past him without a glance. They clambered aboard the streetcar, the girl looking over her shoulder at the boy. Encouraged, he started to run after them, but the ticket collector leaned out from his platform and waved him away.

Cyril watched until they were out of sight. His heart was racing and he felt quite ill. He'd long ago realized the situation couldn't be maintained indefinitely, but this was horribly close. Things were getting worse and worse, dreadful scene after dreadful scene. When she heard about Donald's leaving, it would be even more difficult.

He took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead. He was actually sweating.

Slowly, he went to his desk and sat down. There was a photograph on his desk of himself and Donald, taken on their wedding day. He was beaming and she looked lovely, aglow with an inner joy.

He turned the picture facedown.

A shrill whistle from the speaking tube startled him. He seized his notebook and opened it although Mrs. Stockdale, his nurse, wouldn't dream of coming into the inner office unannounced.

"Mr. Shepcote is calling, Doctor. Shall I put him through?"

"Yes."

He pulled the telephone towards him and put the hearing piece to his ear.

"Rhodes here."

The voice on the other end was so low and throaty he wouldn't have recognized it as Shepcote's.

"Rhodes, I have to cancel this evening's salon. I'm not up to it ..."

Cyril's heart sank. He had promised Charlotte she would meet the famous actress Flo Wortley, and he knew how icy an atmosphere would prevail when he told them it was cancelled. Not from the girl - she was never like that - but certainly from Martha.

"Rhodes?"

"Y-yes, sorry. Woolgathering over h-here. Perhaps another time ..."

"Perhaps," whispered Shepcote. Cyril heard the click of the receiver. He had hung up.

What appalling manners, no polish at all. Surely a person deserved an explanation. Was there anything he could do instead? he wondered. He sat toying with his pen, making scribbles on the blotter. He almost laughed when he realized what he was drawing. A line of stick men, all of them hanging from a gallows. Oh God, what had he got into?

The speaking tube whistled again.

"Yes?"

"Mr. Latimer is here with his father, Doctor."

"Give me a few minutes. And, Mrs. Stockdale, is Mrs. Spoffard on the telephone?"

"I believe so, Doctor."

"Call her up and cancel her appointment. See if she can come tomorrow."

"Yes, Doctor. What shall I tell her?"

"What?"

"Can I give her a reason for the cancellation?"

"I don't have to explain my every move to that woman."

"Yes, sir, of course not. It's just that..."

Her voice, thin and tinny over the speaking tube, trailed off.

Mrs. Spoffard was a woman with a lot of influence in the city and she was easily displeased, as Rhodes knew.

"Say I had a crisis to deal with." *It's true enough*, thought Cyril.

"Yes, sir. Shall I bring in the file on Mr. Latimer now?"

"Two minutes."

He pulled his notebook towards him and dipped his pen into the inkwell. He was busy writing when the nurse tapped on the door and entered.

Mrs. Mary Stockdale was a tall, willowy woman with fair hair tightly pinned beneath her white, starched bob-cap. She wore a grey shirtwaist and darker grey woollen skirt. A silver watch was pinned on her bodice and a discreet straight silver brooch with the twined serpent indicated she was a graduate of the Royal School of Nursing. She had worked in the Toronto Hospital until she married, when she had to leave. No married women were allowed. Four years later she found herself with two children and a useless husband and had been forced to return to work. She was efficient, punctual and invisible. Rhodes knew nothing whatever about her personal life and had no curiosity at all.

She gave the doctor a little curtsy, handed him a buff file folder and ushered in the patient. Latimer was a bent old man who was dressed in a long, foul-smelling goatskin coat. Incongruously, an old-fashioned stovepipe hat, once an elegant green velvet, was perched on his head. Hovering behind him was a big-boned man with the weather-beaten face of a farmer.

Rhodes pretended to finish his notes while Mrs. Stockdale stood quietly by the door. Then he looked up over his pince-nez.

"Please have a seat, gentlemen."

The nurse brought forward two chairs and the younger man half pulled, half pushed his father into one of them. He

sported a handlebar moustache, drooping and stained yellow at the tips with tobacco juice. He quickly stowed a wad back into his cheek. Mr. Latimer, senior, was short and scrawny with a long white beard and sidewhiskers. His pale blue eyes were swimmy and vacant and he wouldn't look at Rhodes but shrank down into the chair.

"So, h-how are we today, Walter?"

The old man sniffed but said nothing, and his son answered. "We was better for a few days, Doctor, but the trouble has come back again."

"Only to be expected. Has he been taking the medicine?"

"Yes, sir. Just like you said."

The old man growled. "She's still after trying to poison me."

"Da, she's not."

Mr. Latimer grabbed at his own crotch and scratched himself. "You'd say that 'cos she leads you around by your pisser all the time, but she put something in me tea. I saw her do it."

His son's face turned even redder. "My wife is a good woman, Doctor, and she loves me da. But he was taking poorly and she thought it would help if she gave him some tonic. To build him up. Completely harmless. She got it from the catalogue, sir. We all take it and it helps us. But Da is convinced and nothing will sway his mind."

The old man began to pluck at his beard. "She hit me, too."

"Did she now? That doesn't sound too g-good. What happened, Latimer?"

The farmer shifted uncomfortably and twisted his crusher in his hand. "She had to, sir ... well, you see, truth is me da was after pinching her where he shouldn't."

"I see. Walter, you've been misbehaving again ... No, don't spit there! Blast. Mrs. Stockdale, would you m-mind?"

The old man laughed, showing blackened gums. The nurse went to get a cloth. Rhodes stood up and went over to the

chair.

"All right, let's get on with the treatment. Mr. L-Latimer, will you stand behind your father. Don't forget, during the session there must be no interruption."

He pulled the other chair directly in front of the older man and sat down close to him with his knees on either side and his feet between the man's legs.

"Remember what we did before? Animal magnetism? It helped you calm down, didn't it?"

Latimer shrugged but didn't reply.

"Now. Give me your thumbs, like so."

Rhodes demonstrated by making loose fists with his hands, the thumbs upright. The old man did likewise, and Cyril grasped his thumbs with each hand.

"Close your eyes and relax yourself. No harm is going to come to you here."

The old man's callused hands were cold, and Rhodes waited until he could feel the temperature equalizing between his palm and the thumb. Then he let go, inverted his hands, raised his arms above the man's head and made a sweeping movement down his arms, close to his body but not touching.

"You are going into a deep sleep, a deep and refreshing sleep. You are feeling very tired. Very tired and very heavy."

His voice was strong and clear. When he was inducing magnetic sleep he never seemed to stutter.

He made the passing motion again. Up to the head and then in a big sweep down the arms again and along the thighs to the calves, back up and down to the flaccid stomach.

"Sleep. Deeply sleep."

He kept repeating these words and making the passes over the old man's body until twenty minutes had elapsed. The son was by now leaning against the wall looking as if he were mesmerized himself. Mrs. Stockdale stood, waiting

calmly. Latimer gave a little snore and his head dropped forward onto his chest.

“Walter Latimer, listen to what I say. When you wake up from this sleep, you will find all your worries have disappeared. They have vanished away like dandelion fluff in a breeze. You will feel in wonderful humour, happy and content. You are with a family that loves you and you have nothing to fear. I repeat, when you awaken, your worries will have all evaporated. They will not return ...”

He repeated this injunction twice more.

“Now I am going to wake you up. At the count of three you will feel a gentle breeze on your face and you will come completely awake.”

Rhodes reached his hand to the nurse, and she handed him a long feather.

“One ... two ... three.” He leaned forward and lightly stroked the old man’s forehead with the feather and at the same time blew on him lightly.

Latimer opened his eyes, which already seemed clearer and more focused.

“Where am I?”

“In the office of Dr. Rhodes,” answered Mrs. Stockdale in her crisp voice. The man swivelled around to look at her and caught sight of his son.

“Dickie! What are you doing here?”

“I brought you to see the doctor, Da.”

“I’ve been poorly again, have I?”

“You have that.”

“I feel right as rain now.”

Rhodes stood up, pleased. Mesmerism was the thing he liked best of all. It almost always worked, could relieve pain and anxiety better than any medicine. He spoke to the farmer.

“Make another appointment for your father for next week. Mrs. Stockdale will make up some more medicine.”

Dickie reached out and grasped Cyril's hand, shaking it heartily. "I can't thank you enough, Doctor."

Rhodes withdrew his hand hurriedly and backed away. "I-just doing what's needed. Mrs. Stockdale, give him another bottle of laudanum. Two grams of opium, add some cherry water." He nodded at the son. "If your father shows any return of the delusions before next week, simply give him an extra dose with a shot glass of brandy. Do you have some brandy in the house?"

"No, sir, we're temperance."

"Never mind, then. The laudanum will be sufficient."

His father smiled at him sweetly. "Have you got a plug there, Dickie?"

"When we get outside."

Mrs. Stockdale took the old man by the arm. "Come with me, sir."

He shuffled off with her but at the door he paused and glanced over his shoulder at Rhodes.

"Women'll do you in every time if you let them," he said.

"Da!"

He hurried his father out of the office, and Rhodes went back behind his desk.

They certainly will, he thought.

Chapter Sixteen

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 15

THE CANDLES AND LAMPS IN THE HOUSES along Lowther had been lit early against the dreary afternoon. Only Birchlea seemed dark and unwelcoming. The curtains were drawn and none of the outside lamps were on.

Like the other houses on the street, Birchlea bespoke quiet affluence. Set back from the street behind a wrought-iron fence, the property was edged with evergreens now laden with snow. Two blue spruce stood sentinel on either side of the door, and the deep bay windows gave a pleasing symmetry. The dark green trim of the dormers and windows was virtually the same colour as the needles of the pine trees.

On the porch, Murdoch scraped the snow from his boots as best he could and waited for somebody to answer his knock. When the door finally opened John Foy stood there, and Murdoch registered the quick look of fear in his eyes.

"I'd like to speak to Mrs. Rhodes."

"I'll see if she's at home."

He hesitated, trying to determine whether he should close the door and leave Murdoch on the doorstep, bring him into the vestibule or send him to the back door. Murdoch solved the problem for him by stepping forward.

"I'll wait inside, shall I?"

Foy retreated down the hall, leaving Murdoch to take care of his own hat and coat. As he hung them up on the oaken hall tree, he checked his reflection in the oval mirror. He smoothed back his hair, wishing he'd worn a fresh collar and

trimmed his moustache, which was overhanging his lip a bit too much.

The vestibule itself was almost as large as the entire living room in the house he'd grown up in, and there were more oil paintings hung on the burgundy-papered walls than had existed in the entire village. Most of them seemed to be landscapes full of tumbling clouds and low trees that were distinctively English in character. He paused in front of one small one. A young woman stood on a desolate beach, staring out across a tumultuous sea. She was holding a shawl tight over her head against the fierce wind, and a curly haired child clung to her skirts. In the distance a lifeboat valiantly climbed the back of a huge wave as it made for the spar of a ship barely showing above the water. A brass plate at the bottom of the frame named the picture. *Sorrow*. Murdoch grimaced. He'd witnessed a shipwreck when he was twelve and he remembered keenly the grief of the women. There must have been a dozen of them, all ages, from young brides up to old women whose sons were on the stricken trawler. They had huddled together against the wind and against the fear that was in all their hearts. It was the sea, as well, who had robbed him of his mother. She was a tiny woman, far too thin, not at all like the young woman in the painting. She'd been found drowned in a shallow pool on the rocky beach. His father put out that she'd slipped on a rock when she was gathering mussels, but Murdoch had grown up with bitter suspicions. He had vivid memories of his mother cowering behind the door to avoid the deluge of his father's drunken rages. There were the three children then. Suzanna, as sweet as the child in the painting but nervous and too quiet, and Albert, barely walking yet, but already showing signs of his affliction. They all knew better than to cling to their mother's skirt. She couldn't protect them.

He touched the brass plate with his fingertip. *Sorrow*.

He moved away. A little farther down the hall was a japanned table with a silver tray in the centre for calling cards. He smiled to himself. His sister had loved to play "visiting" when they were children. Leaves acted as pasteboard and the tray was a piece of tin. He sighed. She certainly didn't need a card tray now. When she was barely sixteen she'd run off and joined an order of cloistered nuns from Montreal. He was allowed to visit the convent once a year and then he could only talk to her through a curtained grid. The priest said he should rejoice that she had chosen a life with Christ, but he grieved. He had looked forward to the sharing of their lives, of her children playing with his, and he constantly reproached himself that he had not been able to take her away from their father in time.

"Detective Murdoch ..." Foy was standing at the door of the drawing room. "Madam would be happy to receive you." He glanced towards the hall tree but made no apology for his lack of attention. "Mrs. Rhodes and Mr. Owen are both taking tea at the moment."

"Good, that'll save me having to repeat myself."

"This way, if you please."

Man moves like he's got a broom up his arse, thought Murdoch as he followed Foy into the drawing room.

Donalda Rhodes and Owen were sitting next to the hearth and Edith was serving them from the tea trolley. The boy, Joe, was building up the fire with coal from the shuttle. He didn't turn around but the other three did, and Murdoch saw worry in each face. However, Donalda immediately assumed an expression of polite welcome.

"Mr. Murdoch, do come in." She indicated the tea trolley. "May I offer you some tea?"

"No, thank you, ma'am."

He didn't fancy trying to cope with a fragile cup and saucer, cake plate and his notebook.

"Will there be anything else, madam?" asked Foy, about to withdraw.

Before Mrs. Rhodes could answer, Murdoch said, "I'd like everybody to stay, if you don't mind."

"The servants as well?"

"If you please. Makes my job a bit easier. Then I don't have to go over everything twice."

It was also a good way to have all the cards out on the table. It was amazing what people could forget. Saying things out in front of company had a way of jogging the memory and the conscience.

"Well, of course, if you say so."

"We are shorthanded, madam," said Edith. "There is some mending to be done."

"I won't take long," said Murdoch.

Edith looked sour as she wheeled the trolley away from the fireside. Foy remained beside the door, and Murdoch intercepted a quick warning glance between him and his wife.

Murdoch took the rosary out of his pocket. "Do any of you recognize this?"

Owen leaned forward. "That's a rum-looking necklace."

"It's a rosary. We believe it belonged to Therese Laporte. The crucifix is missing."

The housekeeper came closer and peered at the rosary. "That's hers, all right. I saw her holding it once or twice. Couldn't understand what she was doing. I'm Methodist myself."

Murdoch glanced around at the rest of them. Owen had returned to his chair. He started to play with the silk fringe on the lampshade, flicking it back and forth. The boy had turned around but was motionless, staring down at the carpet. Murdoch went closer to him, the rosary dangling from his fingers. Joe glanced up and reached out his hand to touch the green beads. Murdoch had deliberately placed himself between the boy and the others, and he alone saw the look of naked yearning on Joe's face.

"Where did you find it?" asked Donald.

Murdoch faced her. "To tell you the truth, ma'am, it was around the neck of a woman who was found dead yesterday morning. Which is the reason I'm here."

They all stared at him incredulously. *That woke them up a bit*, he thought. Owen stopped in midflick.

"What happened to her?" he asked.

"She was murdered. Strangled."

"I say! How dreadful."

"Yes, it was." Murdoch took out his pen and notebook. "I need to ask where each of you was on Wednesday evening."

"What? Surely it doesn't have anything to do with us," said Donald.

"I hope not, Mrs. Rhodes."

She stared at him in disbelief. The others watched, stiff with wariness.

"The deceased was a prostitute. We know now that she was the one who stole Therese Laporte's clothes."

"Is she the one who gave her the drug?" asked Mrs. Rhodes.

"I doubt it."

Another silence. John Foy was surreptitiously leaning against the doorjamb, looking decidedly under the weather. Edith had stationed herself beside the tea trolley like a warden. Her face was grim and tight with disapproval. As for the boy, Joe, Murdoch almost forgot him, he was so still. He was crouched by the fender, half sitting.

"Are the two deaths connected, Mr. Murdoch?" asked Donald.

"At the moment, ma'am, I can't say definitely, but I strongly suspect they are."

Owen got up abruptly and went to the trolley with his cup and saucer. "Are you sure you won't have some tea, Mr. Murdoch?"

"Positive, thank you."

Murdoch could see the black crepe that festooned the mantel and the black ribbon around the pictures, the

trappings of mourning. He felt a flash of anger. Every last one of them was hiding something. He could smell it. He waited.

Suddenly, a piece of coal collapsed with a spurt of flame. All eyes turned to watch as if it were a fireworks display. Murdoch gave them a few more moments, then said, "Mr. Foy, let's start with you. Your whereabouts on Wednesday night?"

"Me? Well, yes, in fact I was out all evening. I had a Masonic meeting and Mrs. Rhodes kindly gave me the evening off. I was at the temple on Yonge Street and I can give you fifty names to prove it."

Foy's normally colourless voice had a distinctly belligerent edge to it.

"Five will do. And their place of residence if you know it."

The butler rattled off half a dozen names and addresses, which Murdoch wrote down.

"Mrs. Foy, can you confirm your husband's statement?"

"Naturally. He left after supper was served, about six-thirty."

"When did you return, Mr. Foy?"

Edith answered for him. "Twelve on the dot. The clock was chiming. Woke me up."

Again her lips tightened, and Murdoch could guess at the welcome Foy had received when he'd stumbled into bed full as a lord.

"You were home yourself, Mrs. Foy?"

"Of course!"

Murdoch turned to the boy. "Joe, my lad?"

Surprised, he nodded.

"Were the horse and carriage in the stable?"

Joe hesitated, then almost imperceptibly shook his head.

"Who had them?"

"I don't think you'll get much out of him, Officer," said Edith. "He's slow-witted. Or at least pretends to be."

Joe lowered his head again and his expression returned to dullness.

"Joe?"

The boy shrank back as if he would climb into the fire itself.

"Well? Who had taken the carriage? Was it Dr. Rhodes?"

Donalda interrupted. "My husband never uses the carriage at night, Mr. Murdoch. His office hours are too unpredictable. Joe takes him in the morning and he comes back by hired cab when he has finished."

Edith shifted her position. Her voice was polite but Murdoch saw malice cross her face. "I have to say, Sergeant – knowing as how this is a police investigation – I have to say I overheard Mr. Owen leaving in the carriage. 'Bout ten o'clock it was. I was on the point of retiring for the night."

Donalda glanced over at her son. "Is that so, Owen?"

"Yes, I was about to fess up when Edith beat me to the punch."

"You were out on Wednesday night, then, sir?"

"I was. I had some tests to catch up on. I went down to the laboratory to burn the midnight oil. My examinations are coming up before too long."

"Was anybody else with you?"

"Yes, a couple of the fellows."

"Who were they, these friends? May I have their names?"

Owen was looking most uncomfortable. "Good Lord, no. I mean, what am I saying? I was by myself. I'm getting mixed up with other evenings. Yes, that's it. Sorry, no friends."

"So there's nobody who can confirm your statement. A night porter, for instance."

"Er, I doubt it. Old Grant is just that, old. He was asleep, as I recall." He gave an embarrassingly false laugh. "Ha, a whole contingent of thieves could have got in and they wouldn't have woken him. Not that there's anything to steal there. Who wants pickled embryos?"

You're one of the worst liars I've come across , thought Murdoch, but at the moment I haven't the sod of a notion what you're lying about.

"What time did you get back to Birchlea, sir?"

"Oh, I don't know. One o'clock maybe."

Murdoch looked at Donald. "You, ma'am, were you at home?"

"Yes."

"And Dr. Rhodes?"

"I cannot answer for my husband, Mr. Murdoch. After dinner I spent the evening in my room. I don't know whether he was in or not."

"He was not, madam," said Edith. "The doctor left the house sometime after Master Rhodes. I believe he didn't return until this morning."

"Father likes to spend the odd night at his club," interjected Owen.

"I'm aware of that, Master Rhodes. I am merely trying to give the officer the correct information."

Murdoch abruptly changed tack, see if they ducked the yardarm.

"What colour is your carriage and horse, Mrs. Rhodes?"

"I beg your pardon."

"We have evidence that Therese got into a carriage shortly before she died. It was described as burgundy or dark brown in colour and the horse light."

Donald met his eyes without flinching. "Our carriage is walnut and the horse is a grey."

He continued. "Have any of you ever seen a man with a snake tattoo on his right hand? Stocky build, fair short hair, rough sort of face? Says he is a sailor."

Blank faces stared at him, and he thought the bewilderment was genuine. He closed his notebook.

"Is that everything, Mr. Murdoch?"

"Not exactly, ma'am. There's still the matter of Therese Laporte's condition. It might further our solving both cases if

we had that mystery nailed down."

"I cannot tell you anything more than I've already said. Theresa had no suitors and frankly no time that I can see when she would have been with anyone."

"If that is the case, then her seducer must be closer to home, wouldn't you agree, ma'am?"

Donalda straightened her back even more. "Let me say I can understand your considering it so."

Edith Foy made a peculiar sound that was a cross between a snort and a cough.

"Is there something you wish to say, Edith?"

"There is, madam."

"For goodness' sake, speak out, then," Donalda said with irritation.

Edith's lips drew tighter together. "You don't have to go far to find the culprit. He's right there." She pointed at Joe Seaton, who had been sitting on the edge of the fender while they were all talking. "He's the one got the girl in trouble, mark my words."

Joe shrank away and covered his head with his arms as if to ward off blows.

"These are serious accusations, Mrs. Foy," said Murdoch. "Can you prove them?"

"He's a guttersnipe and they never change no matter what good is shown them. Besides, he's backward. Can't tell the difference between Christian right and wrong any more than a dog can."

Murdoch found it hard not to snap back at the woman. His younger brother had been backward, and until the boy died Murdoch had spent a large part of their childhood defending him against similar ignorance. He moved over to Joe and tried to pull down his arm so he could see his face. The boy yelped in pain.

"What is it, Joe? Have you hurt your arm?"

He shook his head violently. As gently as he could, Murdoch pushed back the boy's sleeve. Two angry red lines

ran the entire length of the boy's arm.

"Good Lord, what happened?"

Edith moved closer, and when she saw the boy's arm she said, "Somebody scratched him, that's what. Probably fighting for her life. It's proof."

Murdoch ignored her. The cuts were too deliberate to be the result of a struggle.

"How did you get these marks, Joe?"

The boy wouldn't meet his eyes, just tried to shake his head.

Murdoch crouched down so that he was on the same level and all Joe could see was him.

"Tell me the truth now, lad. Is it right what Mrs. Foy says? That you had connections with Therese Laporte?"

Joe stared at him as if he couldn't comprehend. Murdoch's heart sank. He hoped for Joe's sake it wasn't true.

"See, he's practically admitting it." This time it was Foy who spoke. "They were made for each other. Pair of bastards with no compunction about bringing bastards into the world."

Murdoch could see that the lad's mouth and chin were trembling and there were tears in his eyes.

"Joe?"

"You might as well talk to a brick wall," snorted Edith. "The boy's simple."

"If we stop badgering him, we might get somewhere," said Donalda. She spoke to the boy in a gentle voice. "Answer the officer, Joe. If you're innocent you have nothing to fear."

Joe responded to her like a prisoner to the parson who has come to read the Last Rites. He fixed his gaze on her over Murdoch's shoulder and said, "I didn't have nuffin bad to do with Tess."

His voice was low and shaky as if from lack of use and he had a thick cockney accent, but the words were

unmistakable. The others were as surprised as if the horse had answered.

"Hmm. Thought the cat'd got your tongue. You sly little beast, pretending you couldn't speak all this time," said Edith.

Murdoch had had enough. "I'll thank you to hold your tongue yourself, Mrs. Foy. This is still a police investigation, I'd like to remind you, and you, madam, are interfering with the due process." He stepped back, touching Joe lightly on the shoulder. "Go on, lad."

Joe didn't budge from his focus on Mrs. Rhodes.

"Tess didn't write no letter, missus."

"What do you mean?"

"You says as how she wrote to 'er sister but she couldn't have. She couldn't write nor read. I know 'cos I was the one a-teachin' 'er and she hadn't got no farther than her letters."

Murdoch turned to Edith. "Mrs. Foy, you found that note in the girl's bedroom, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did. It was clear as a bell. I don't know what he's talking about."

"Do you still have it?"

"I threw it in the fire. It didn't seem important."

Joe's voice dropped to a whisper. "Tess didn't run away 'cos she was homesick."

Donalda nodded encouragingly. "Why did she, then?"

He cast a quick glance at Foy but returned to her at once. "It was 'cos of 'im. He was after Tess. He wanted to do it with her all the time."

"You bloody little liar," Foy yelled. Before Murdoch could prevent him, he had run at Joe and hit him hard across the face. The boy fell backwards, striking his head against the fireguard with a sickening bang. His eyes rolled up in his head and he lay still. Owen yelled and jumped up to help while Murdoch grabbed the butler's arm, yanking him away, hard.

“Stop it. Behave or I’ll charge you with obstruction of justice.”

Foy kept on shouting. “That boy is wicked, Mrs. Rhodes. I knew we should never have got him. His kind never changes.”

Edith pulled at her husband. “Stop it, do you hear? Won’t do no good.”

Murdoch pointed to an empty chair. “Go and sit over there.” His voice topped the butler’s. “Don’t move again unless I tell you to.”

He half shoved Foy towards the chair. The butler seemed to have lost all control and he was shaking, his face crimson with rage. Edith gripped him by his shoulders.

“Try not to make more of a bloody fool of yourself than you’ve done already,” she hissed into his face.

Murdoch waited until Foy obeyed, keeping his eye on him.

“Is the boy all right?” he asked Owen, who had run over to help Joe.

“He lost consciousness for a moment but he’s not badly off now.” He slipped his arm around the boy’s shoulders. “Come on, Joe. Let’s get you up.”

He lifted him into a sitting position against the fender. Donald, who had remained seated, spoke to Foy, her voice icy. “Is this true what Joe says?”

“No, madam, absolutely not,” he replied. But guilt was written all over his angry face.

Donald addressed Edith. “How could you have found a letter written by a girl who was illiterate?”

“The boy probably forged it.”

“Joe? Can you speak?”

A red mark had appeared on his cheek and he was the colour of bread dough, but he met her eyes.

“I didn’t write no letter. But Missus Foy knew as what was happening. I saw ’er a-watching Tess all the time. She must of made her run off.”

“Madam, I hope you are not going to take the word of a boy like him against that of two respectable people like my husband and me?”

“Frankly, Edith, I don’t know what to believe. All I can say is that I am extremely upset at Foy’s behaviour. I will not tolerate it.” She turned to her son. “Owen, what do you say about all this?”

“I wouldn’t trust John Foy as far as I could throw him.”

Edith answered for her husband. “How easy for the mighty to accuse those of us who are not so fortunate. Far better the world think my husband was wicked, madam, than that your own son be accused.” She whirled to face Murdoch. “Why don’t you question him?” She pointed at Owen. “I saw him mooning over that girl all the time. That night she died he was probably with her.”

“According to Mr. Rhodes he was with Miss Shepcote all evening.”

Edith burst out, “That little mouse would make a pact with the Devil if Owen Rhodes asked her to.” She was reckless now, ready to burn her bridges. “He fancied the maid, I tell you. And that Saturday night he was out until the early hours too. Same with this Wednesday. He was probably with that doxie you found.”

“Edith, don’t be preposterous,” Donalda cried.

“Maybe he’s the one who did her in. It’d keep her quiet, wouldn’t it?”

Owen turned white and Donalda became even stiffer.

“Mrs. Foy, I will tolerate no more of this slander. You are discharged. Both of you. You will leave my employ immediately.”

“Don’t expect me to be silent, then. You can try to hide all you like but the truth is the truth. Your son was having connections with that girl and I will tell whoever asks.”

Murdoch stepped in. “Mr. Rhodes, do you deny this?”

“My God, yes. Of course I deny it.”

There was no stopping Edith. "He's a young man, isn't he? Anybody can see he fancies himself. He had his way with her, you can wager."

"Mrs. Foy, will you stop. I had nothing whatsoever to do with Therese Laporte."

"Why is it, then, I saw you coming out of her room? About a month ago it was -"

"That is a lie -"

"Edith, stop this." Donaldalda tried to stop the spewing. "Mrs. Foy is lying to protect her husband," she said to Murdoch. "She has already forged a letter. She has no compunction about where she flings her mud."

"At the moment, ma'am, it is her word against Mr. Owen's, however, and not much proof on either side."

"I assure you he was not with a prostitute the other night, just as I assure you he was not the father of Theresa's child."

Owen stood watching her, his face filled with agony. "Mother, this is not necessary ..."

"Begging your pardon, ma'am, you are his mother and it is only natural you would defend him, but I'll need proof. Mr. Rhodes, is there anybody at all who could vouch for your whereabouts on Wednesday night?"

"No, there really isn't."

"Owen, are you insane? Tell him."

"Mother, there is nothing to tell. I was not with anybody."

Donaldalda's expression was bitter. "This is no time to display some schoolboy notion of honour."

"Call it that if you -" said Owen.

At that moment, the door opened and Cyril Rhodes entered.

"What on earth is happening? What is the shouting all about?" He saw Murdoch and halted.

Donaldalda swung around to face him. "What impeccable timing, Cyril. Joe has accused Foy of fathering a child on

Theresa Laporte. Edith is insisting the real culprit is our son. She claims to have seen Owen leaving the girl's room."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed. And Mr. Murdoch is here investigating the murder of another young woman. He wants to know where we all were on Wednesday night. Apparently the dead woman was a prostitute. Perhaps you could help him."

"W-what do you mean? How could I help?"

"Come now, Cyril, I doubt your tastes have changed that much. Perhaps she was someone of your acquaintance."

Chapter Seventeen

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 15

MURDOCH BREATHED IN THE FRESH AIR of the street with relief. The drawing room had become overheated in more ways than one. He decided to check on Foy's alibi first. He didn't doubt it was a real one, but he wanted to get a better sense of the man, and his chums might reveal something.

The grey afternoon had moved imperceptibly into night and this outer edge of the city had no street lighting. Trudging through the snow, Murdoch was keenly aware that this had been the street Therese had fled along so recently. Many of the big houses glowed with light and where the curtains were open he could see well-furnished drawing rooms, well-dressed people living their lives. Had she felt the loneliness of an outsider? With an illegitimate child on the way, her prospects must have seemed bleak indeed. Who was the father? He was betting on Foy but he was too wise to let personal dislike influence him, and he knew the culprit was still uncertain.

At Church Street he checked his watch. It had taken him ten minutes to walk this far, going at a moderate pace. At least his timing was holding up. However, he didn't feel like walking the whole way. He'd had enough shank's mare for one day. He saw a streetcar coming up on the tracks and stepped forward to flag it down.

One of the men named by John Foy was a butcher who lived on Parliament Street, close to the medical school. Murdoch decided to see him first. Light snow was starting to fall, tickling his face, and the wind was gusting. He'd got off the

streetcar at Gerrard, exchanged a few words with an excited Carrots, who greeted him from his spot on the curb, and began his walk east, again aware that he was following in Therese's footsteps. The residences that lined Gerrard Street were elegant and well kept. Several of them sat in spacious grounds, and brass plates on the iron fences proclaimed these were doctors' houses.

Just past the corner of Sherbourne there was a charitable home for girls under fourteen who had been in need of rescue. The lamps were lit and he could see into the front room. A half-dozen girls all in neat white pinafores over grey dresses were gathered around an organ. Their mouths were opening and closing like fledgling birds, and he gathered they were singing. Hymns, probably, to judge by their serious expressions. A portly matron was conducting them, waving her arms in awkward dignity. Therese Laporte had not been much older than those girls.

Fred Vose's shop was above Gerrard Street on the west side of Parliament, the end building of a row of three, all newish looking in elegant pink brick. The store adjacent to the butcher's was vacant, the windows shuttered, but the remaining one was lit sufficiently for Murdoch to read the plain, dignified sign: J. CARVETH, MEDICAL BOOKSELLERS. Like the sparrows who chase the crows waiting for droppings, Mr. Carveth had situated himself conveniently close to the medical college, and he seemed to have both a sense of humour and a sense of business. In the window was a skeleton pointing a fleshless finger at a stepladder draped with purple velvet. On each step was a fat tome pertinent to the student's education according to Dr. Osler, including, Murdoch was glad to see, a weighty volume of Shakespeare's complete works. He paused for a moment, reading the other titles the eminent doctor considered necessary to a medical student's mental well-being. The Old and New Testament, of course, Plutarch's *Lives* and, rather

surprisingly, *Don Quixote*. Murdoch experienced a twinge of envy for the wealthy young men who could afford to spend five years in uninterrupted studies. Given the chance, he would have loved to enter the university, but it was out of the question for somebody with no means except what his own muscles could earn. He moved on.

Mr. Vose's shop window was hung with several carcasses. Unbutchered pigs, the gash in their throats like second mouths, swayed on big hooks, intermixed with the bloodied bodies of hares and rabbits and sides of beef. Beneath them were displayed various trays of grey tripe, dark red liver and kidneys. Two skinned and eyeless calves' heads sat in the centre.

A bell tinkled as he entered the shop. He glanced around. There was only one scone lit, and the corners of the store were pools of darkness where he could just make out the sacks of sawdust for the floor and a couple of tubs of brine in which were floating several pig's trotters. The bead curtain behind the counter parted and a man appeared from the backroom. He was brawny, with a broad, red face. Muscular arms swelled beneath his blue flannel shirt. His apron was dark with bloodstains. He was smoking a long clay pipe and the pungent tobacco mingled with the smell of blood and raw meat.

"What can I do for you, Captain? The missus craving a nice fresh roast, is she?"

Murdoch spent a moment to shake the snow off his coat and undid his muffler. "Are you Fred Vose?"

"I am unless my mother was deceiving me."

"I'm Detective William Murdoch, and I'd like a few minutes of your time to answer some questions."

"Lordy, hammer away, Captain."

"I understand you're acquainted with John Foy?"

"I am that. What's up? Has John done something he shouldn't?" Vose's eyes gleamed with curiosity.

"He's not been charged, if that's what you mean, but I'm conducting an investigation and I'd like you to verify his statement."

"Does it have to do with that poor maid as froze to death? She was a maid at Birchlea, wasn't she?"

"That's right." Murdoch chose not to mention Alice Black at this moment.

"John was very shaken by that girl's passing. As soon as my wife and I read about it in the newspaper we went straight over to see him."

"What did he have to say?"

"He couldn't understand how she'd come to die like that. To tell you square, Captain, at one point he was weeping like a woman. I've never seen him like that before."

Foy seemed to show a more delicate side of his nature to his brothers than Murdoch had yet witnessed.

"If you ask me," Vose went on, "Johnny was more bothered even than Edith ... but then she is a bit of a flinty sort, if you know what I mean. It's understandable, though, isn't it? That maid was hardly more than a child. Still, I suppose, given she was a half-breed, we shouldn't be surprised."

"She was French-Canadian, not of mixed heritage that I know of."

"Oh. Well, anyway, she was a Catholic for certain and you never know what funny thing they're going to get up to."

"I don't follow your logic, Mr. Vose."

"Why d'you think she was out getting herself froze to death?" He stared at Murdoch.

"What's your theory, Mr. Vose?"

"I'll wager she was doing what they call penance. Do you know what that is?"

"Yes."

"Pain is what it is. I've heard that they get nuns and priests to lie stretched out for hours on the church floor.

Think it's good for their souls." He waved his forefinger at Murdoch. "Some of them even beat themselves."

Murdoch didn't bother to attempt justification of his church's practices.

"You wouldn't get me doing anything like that," said the butcher.

"What I wanted to know is concerning a different matter. Can you verify Foy's statement as to his whereabouts last Wednesday? He claims he spent the evening at a lodge meeting."

Vose concentrated on getting his pipe going, sucking vigorously on the long stem. Finally he exhaled with pleasure.

"Wednesday? For sure. I can tell you straight and true, he was squatting beside me the entire time. Tim Winter was on my right, John Foy on my left."

Suddenly he put the pipe on the counter and wiped his right hand hard down the side of his apron. "Sorry there, Captain, I didn't even give you a proper greeting."

He thrust out his broad hand and, rather puzzled, Murdoch shook it. When he let go he caught an expression of disappointment in Vose's eyes and it dawned on him that there must be a secret Masonic handshake the butcher was testing on him. He had no idea what it was.

Vose went back to fiddling with his pipe.

"Did Foy leave the room at any time?" Murdoch asked him.

"Had to, didn't he? Twice. To let go his water."

"Did he go alone?"

"Nope. Him and me both went. But I can vouch he didn't go anywhere beyond the laneway."

"Drinks a lot, does he?"

Vose's eyebrows rose in surprise. "Not more than any other fellow."

"How would you say he holds his liquor? Like a man or a red Indian?"

Vose puffed on his pipe again, letting out a cloud of aromatic smoke that made Murdoch want to take out his own Powhattan.

"Most men gets jolly when we've mashed a few," said Vose. "Foy's no different, that I can recall."

"Has he ever had quarrels or rows with the brothers?"

"Nope. If anything he's the peacekeeper. Bobbie Reynolds and Tim Winter have butted heads a couple of times and John just honey-talked them right out of it."

Murdoch switched tack. "Have you ever met a woman named Alice Black?"

"Never."

"Did Foy ever mention the name?"

Again Vose shook his head emphatically. "Nope. Who is she?"

"*Was* is more like it. She was found murdered early this morning."

Vose whistled. "Great Thor, you're not suggesting John is mixed up in that?"

"Let's hope not."

"Sorry I can't help you, Captain. I've never heard tell of her. How'd she die?"

"She was strangled. Her body was found not far from the distillery on the lake."

"Lordy, Lordy. Was she a jade, then?"

"She was."

Vose was silent, concentrating on his pipe. There seemed nothing more forthcoming. Murdoch started to rewrap his muffler.

"Thank you, Mr. Vose. I won't keep you any longer."

"No hurry. To speak square, this is the most excitement I've had all week. I haven't always been a butcher, you see. I used to own a smithy up near the old tollgate on Yonge Street, and I tell you, Captain, I miss it something fierce. I got to shoe the travellers' horses and you wouldn't believe what a grand variety of folks came by my door. They told

me such stories. You know, where they'd been, different people they'd met. One man had even saw the Queen herself, right up close. He said she was a little bit of a thing. Pretty as a picture then. This was before the tragedy, of course." The bowl shone red as he sucked hard on the stem. "Not only that, I miss the horses. Beautiful animals, horses are. Some folks say as how they're stupid but that ain't the case. They have a different intelligence from us is all. They'd always know who they could trust. And I never came across a skittish horse that I couldn't calm. D'you want to hear how I did it?"

The butcher looked so wistful Murdoch couldn't say no. He nodded.

"I whistle to them soft like this." Vose started a low trill through his teeth. The tone was sweet and birdlike and Murdoch could imagine it calming the savage beast.

"I did a stint at a lumber camp near Huntsville when I was younger," Murdoch said. "There was a fellow there had charge of two Percherons and he treated them like they was his sons. Combing and brushing them with a silk cloth 'til their coats shone like show horses. And those manes! You'd think you was touching a woman's hair."

He didn't add that Farqueson had whipped his horses quick enough when a load had been about to come crashing down on him. But that was only human nature.

Vose beamed. "Yeah. I understands that. I wouldn't've sold up 'cept I ruined my back from too much bending and lifting. I had to stop. Besides which the wife found the forge awful far up. This shop was her idea. Not that the work's so much easier. Those beeves'd challenge Hercules himself." He waved his pipe for emphasis. "Of course, I don't sell no horsemeat even though there's some as do. Would be like having a pal hanging there."

Murdoch started to edge towards the door. "I'd better be off. I've got other places to check out."

"Hold on a minute," said Vose. He put down his pipe and in a flash wrapped up a rasher of bacon in some brown paper.

"Here you go, on the house."

Murdoch thanked him.

"Come back anytime. I'll have some fresh chickens next week. Raise them myself out back." He followed Murdoch to the threshold. "There is one thing might be worth telling you, Captain, though I probably shouldn't."

Murdoch paused.

"At one of our lodge meetings Foy lets drop as how he was having some trouble at home. What sort of trouble, I asks. 'The wife's been acting awful jealous these days,' he says. 'Does she have any cause, John?' I asks, and he gives me a wink. 'Maybe,' he says. 'That's not good, John,' I says. 'Come on,' he says, 'who's gonna resist a taste of fresh meat when all he's had for years is salt pork?'"

"What was he meaning by that, d'you think?"

"I have the suspicion he was dipping his wick in some soft tallow where he shouldn't."

"The maid?"

"More than likely."

"Thank you, Mr. Vose. If anything else occurs, come round to the station. Number four on Wilton. You know where it is, don't you?"

"I do. You've got a couple of fine horses over there, but that bay gelding is favouring his rear leg. You should get him looked at."

"I'll pass that along to the livery constable."

The snow was heavier now, sticking to the ground in a fluffy layer. He walked back to Gerrard Street and turned east towards the medical school.

He wasn't surprised at what Vose had said but he felt angry again. He doubted Therese had responded willingly to

Foy. He'd probably forced himself on her, and even if it was the cold that had directly killed her, Foy was still accountable. He'd have to have another talk with the unctuous butler. See how conversant he was with opium.

A footman ushered Owen Rhodes downstairs to the billiard room. The smoke from Hugh McDonough's innumerable cigarettes hung like an autumn fog over the smooth green baize and a fresh cheroot was balanced precariously on the leather corner pocket. He was in the midst of lining up his next shot but when Owen came in he straightened and dipped his cue in a mock military salute.

"Roddy, what brings you out in such miserable weather? God, you look half-frozen. Let me get you some cheer."

"No, not right now. I have to talk to you. Is it private here?"

"Absolutely. What's up?"

Owen explained as succinctly as he could what had been happening, the visit from Murdoch earlier that afternoon and the reason for it.

"He wanted to know where I was on Wednesday night."

Hugh stiffened. "And what did you tell him?"

"That I was in the lab 'til all hours."

"Good thinking."

"Even if he checks, old Grant is such a muddlehead, he wouldn't know for sure if Prince Bertie himself came in."

"What if he's positive, though, what then? What will you tell the police fellow?"

"I don't know. I haven't considered that far ahead."

Hugh rubbed chalk on his billiard cue with great concentration. "Perhaps you'd better, Roddy." He poked Owen not too gently in the ribs with the end of his cue. "You're not considering a big confession or anything like that, are you, Roddy?"

Owen frowned. "Do you think I'm insane? Of course I'm not."

"That's good." Hugh smiled. "Come on. Cheer up, you look like a scared rabbit."

"To tell you the truth I feel like one. The fox is sniffing at the door."

"Bosh. He won't find out. And even if he did, what's the worst can happen?"

Owen stared at him. "I take it that is not a serious question."

Murdoch was almost past the hospital grounds before he noticed the man huddled just inside the gate. The man was slumped forward with his head on his knees. For a moment he didn't know if he was alive. Then he looked up and Murdoch saw he was young, barely twenty. He stepped closer.

"You can't stay here."

The young man began to struggle to his feet. "Ja, yust resting."

"Where do you live?"

"No place, zur."

"You're German?"

"Ja."

"How long have you been in Toronto?"

"I yust arrive two weeks since."

"Do you have work?"

"Not yet." He managed a pained smile. "There are many other men to choose. Nobody want foreign fellow."

Like so many immigrants he was hopelessly unprepared for the inhospitable climate. He'd found some sacking to wrap around his shoulders but he had no gloves or hat and he was shaking with the cold.

"You'll freeze to death if you stay here," said Murdoch. He reached in his pocket and pulled out his notebook. The snow

immediately began to settle on the page as he wrote.

"Take this note to the police station and ask for Sergeant Seymour. You can stay there for the night. Tomorrow we'll see if we can find you some work."

He tore out the leaf and handed it to the youth, then took him by the arm and faced him in the direction of Sackville Street.

"Go down there and when you get to Wilton, turn right. That way." He indicated the direction. "Keep going until you see the police station. There's a green light over the door. Do you understand me?"

"Ja. Danke schön, danke schön."

Murdoch watched to make sure he was going in the right direction, until he was obscured by the swirling snow. Ahead of Murdoch a lamplighter was reaching up with his pole to light the gas lamp on the corner. It didn't make much difference to the darkness of the street; along Gerrard the lights were widely spaced. Murdoch wished he'd thought to bring his own lantern. Huddled into his coat, hat jammed down on his forehead, he trudged on.

Seymour would be good to the German lad, he thought. He wasn't a perpetual vagrant, that was obvious, and he'd be viewed more favourably. It was the chronic paupers that the city despised and caused the city council to be emphatic about forbidding begging on the streets. The police had instructions to charge anybody found doing so. Recently members of the Ratepayers Association had suggested sectioning off fifty acres of High Park as a poor farm where the paupers and vagrants could live and work. Murdoch thought the idea was highly impractical. You couldn't just dump everybody into one huge stew. There would have to be separate accommodations for those with children, for instance. To subject children to the influence of the desperate and destitute was to ensure they'd follow in those footsteps. Besides, he personally was not in favour of the

out-of-sight, out-of-mind philosophy. He never forgot that there but for the grace of God went he.

By the time he reached the medical school, the street had emptied as people hurried home for their tea. Only one sleigh, bells jingling, had gone by, driven by a young man almost buried underneath the fur wraps, going too fast for the conditions. He was probably on his way to a sleigh party. The horse was blowing hard, its neck pulled in too tightly, its feet high-stepping. Murdoch hated to see animals treated like that.

The school was surrounded by a wrought-iron fence and the buildings were well set back, approached by a wide circular driveway that was rapidly filling with snow. Murdoch could make out the silhouette of the central spire. It didn't soar as high to heaven as the one at St. James's Cathedral, the tallest in the Dominion, but it was a reminder that this place of learning was not godless. There was an appropriate turret at each end of the main block for the studious to retire to, and one or two lights winked through the whirling snow.

To the right of the high gate was a brick lodge. Murdoch could see a soft gleam of candlelight coming through the window. The gate was not locked and Murdoch pushed it open, walked over, brushed away the snow and peered through the glass.

The room within was sparsely furnished, an oil stove in the corner, a wooden chair close to it and a table in the centre. On the rear wall was a board festooned with brass bells. A uniformed man was seated at the table, fast asleep and drooping in his chair. Even as Murdoch watched, he swayed to the side but, without waking, righted himself with a little jerk.

Murdoch went in. The porter was a grey-haired man, thin and worn looking. He could have been old or middle-aged, it was hard to tell. His jaw was slack and Murdoch could see he was virtually toothless. His navy jacket was unbuttoned

at the neck and stained down the front. A cap was pushed back on his head. There was a tin tankard beside him and the sweet smell of ale hung in the air.

"Mr. Grant?"

He snorted and his eyes opened. "'Oo are you?"

"Detective William Murdoch, Toronto Police Force."

Alarm shot across Grant's face. "Sorry, I ... I was just catching a catnap. Never happens usually but, well, I've been a long stretch without sleep."

Quickly, he straightened his cap and fumbled with his buttons.

"I'm on a case right now," said Murdoch. "I want to ask you a few questions concerning one of the students at the college."

Grant blew out his breath with a whistle of relief. "Thank goodness. For a minute there I thought I was getting the gate. Silly of me. They'd hardly send the police to do that, would they?"

"Not unless you were breaking the law."

"What? No, no. I do me job like a soldier. Just got a bit tired, that's all."

They both knew he could be fired if he was reported for taking a tippie, but Murdoch guessed that Grant was on call twenty-four hours a day with one day off a month if he was lucky. In his opinion, that issue was between the porter and his employer, and if the man could sneak a bit of pleasure for himself, good luck to him.

"You said it was concerning one of the students. What have they been up to now?" Grant asked.

"What d'you think?" asked Murdoch, genuinely curious.

"Pranks, no doubt. Don't tell me they've gone and built another snowman?"

"Is that so bad?"

"The last one was. Just afore Christmas some of them sneaked over to the Baptist Seminary on Jarvis Street there. Built a ten-foot-high snowman that looked just like the

minister. I have to say it was right clever. He's got red whiskers and they dyed some sheep's wool, stuck a pair of spectacles on his nose, the whole bit."

"That seems innocent enough."

The porter snickered. "Oh, yes, that was, but then they added a large pink rubber hose. Put it you know where. Shocking it was. I mean young ladies were walking by every day."

Murdoch tut-tutted in sympathy.

"This student you're enquiring about, broke the law, has he?"

Murdoch knew how destructive rumour could be, and he wanted to be fair to Owen Rhodes.

"Let's just say I need to verify his whereabouts at a certain time."

Grant looked uneasy, and Murdoch remembered what Owen had said about his being unreliable.

"Are the students allowed to use the laboratories after class hours?" he asked.

"They are, but not a lot avail themselves. Unfortunately, some of the young gentlemen see their education as a lark. Pity their poor patients, I say. But then that's youth for you. No harm, really. High spirits is all."

Murdoch guessed that the young gentlemen in question made Grant's life miserable. There were at least six bells on the wall and he could imagine the man answering summons after trivial summons.

"You know most of them, do you?"

"Oh yes. See them coming in and out all year."

"But they don't have to sign in after hours."

"They're supposed to, but lookit, they're young. Lot on the mind, as it were. If you gave me a nickel for every Tom and Dick that didn't, I'd be a rich man."

"Can I see the register?"

"Certainly."

He pulled a ledger out of the drawer and opened it, turning it towards Murdoch. Grant was right about the diligence of the medical students. There were no more than four entries on Thursday night and only two on Wednesday. Neither name was Owen's.

"Do you know Mr. Owen Rhodes?"

"Ah yes, sir. I do."

"He says he was here in the laboratory all Wednesday night. Is that so?"

"Certainly is. He's a study, that one. He's here now, as a matter of fact. Came this morning. Been here all day."

"I see. What's he look like?"

"Short, stout fellow, black hair and whiskers. Wears spectacles."

"You're sure that's Mr. Rhodes?"

"Positive. Know him like my own son. That's my job, to know them all. What's he done? Seems like a good sort to me. Doesn't tease like some of the young fellows. But then they're young and -"

Murdoch cut him off. "The Owen Rhodes I'm concerned with is of medium height, slim with copper-coloured hair, no sidewhiskers, small moustache. Favours gaudy waistcoats."

"Ha, don't they all. Quite the fashion these days with the young gentlemen. Those that have the balsam, that is. And most of them do, of course, here." He tapped the bridge of his nose. "Doting fathers. Or mothers, more like. But anyway you was saying this fellow is a carrot-top. Maybe you're thinking of Mr. Beresford. He's a redhead. Quite tall, though, and beefy. Likes his grub."

"Mr. Grant, tell me the truth. I wager these young colts lead you a merry chase when they're in the mood."

"That they do."

"You see a lot of them going back and forth. Must be hard to tell one from the other at times?"

Grant looked as ambivalent as a mouse contemplating the piece of cheese in the trap.

"Oh, no, sir. I'm supposed to know who they are. Keep track and so on. I might make the occasional mistake but no, sir, I know them all."

"And you're sure that the raven-haired Mr. Rhodes who is in the college now was here all Wednesday night?"

"Absolutely."

"Do you mind if I look around?"

"Not at all, Sergeant. The place is deserted, anyway, except for Mr. Rhodes. They all went home early on account of the weather. Any excuse if you're young and carefree."

"I've heard stories about the escapades these students get up to. Didn't some of them start experimenting with laughing gas not too long ago? One took too much, I heard, ending up in the asylum for a week or two."

Grant smiled with the true malevolence of the victimized. "That's right. Last November it was. They were supposed to be learning the effects of ether. Always try it out on themselves. Good thing too. They'll know what it's like when they're doctors, won't they? Should do a bit of amputation, if you ask me." He chortled at his own joke. "But no harm intended, Sergeant. We've all been young, haven't we?"

"Do any of them use opium that you know of?"

"Wouldn't be surprised. They've got all sorts of drugs lying around. They make a lot of them themselves."

More probing didn't elicit further information. Grant was an irritating witness, constantly vacillating between fear of jeopardising his job and the malicious desire to create trouble for the students. Finally Murdoch prevailed on him to show the main building. It took almost an hour to complete the tour. The porter was right about the lone student. He was dark-haired and industrious but his name was Llewellyn and he was of Welsh extraction, with a lilt to his voice. Murdoch hoped he would do well at his studies.

When he finally left and set off again into the blustery winds, Murdoch was sure of one thing. If Owen Rhodes had gone to the college on Wednesday night, he could easily

have done so without Grant knowing or anyone else seeing him. His alibi was neither proven nor disproven.

Chapter Eighteen

She rarely went into his study, and even if she did, would have seen nothing untoward. He was careful about that. Except this morning he wasn't. He put the photographs back in his desk but not in the secret drawer. He also neglected to close the lid, so that was the first thing she noticed. She went to close it. There on the blotting pad were the pictures. Four of them, two of women on their own, one of a man and a woman and the fourth, three people. At first she didn't realize what they were, had never in her life seen such a thing, but when she identified what it was, her legs wouldn't hold her and she sat down. She felt a rush of bile to her mouth and had to spit out into her handkerchief. That was why she didn't hear the door open, didn't know she was not alone until he was beside her. He leaned over and put his finger under her chin, forcing her to look up at him. His shirtsleeves were rolled up to the elbow and she stared at the garish green and red tattoo that curled down his forearm. There was a naked and bleeding girl in the flat-headed snake's mouth. He whispered in her ear. "Curiosity killed the cat, you know."

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 15

DONALDA PACED RESTLESSLY IN HER BEDROOM , her whole being so charged with Murdoch's visit she couldn't sit still. Over and over in her mind she replayed what had happened. The Foy's were packing to leave and she was glad. She was sure John Foy had forced himself on Theresa, and as far as she was concerned he was culpable in the girl's death. She'd run away and perished.

"If only you'd told me," she burst out loud, but she knew that Theresa had been too frightened to do so.

She poked hard at the fire, breaking the lumps of coal into flame. She couldn't imagine Foy administering opium to the girl, however. So who had? That was the most frightening notion of all.

"Damnation!" she said out loud again. She regretted her angry remarks in front of the detective. There was no point in shaming the family. He, of course, had pounced on what she said but for once both she and Cyril were united. She insisted she had spoken carelessly, meant nothing, and Cyril denied any association at all with what he called "women of the night."

Was it true? Even thinking that now made her throat burn, remembering the time so many years ago when he had wept in her lap.

"It will never happen again," he'd said, sobbing like a boy. But she was unrelenting. Her love for him had died with the unborn child, the tiny lump of flesh that she had insisted the midwife show her. It was the same midwife who, nervously, had hinted at the real reason for the miscarriage. Dr. Pollard reluctantly confirmed the truth, and after a stormy confrontation Cyril broke down and confessed. Consorting with prostitutes was a habit he'd picked up in medical school, and it had continued throughout their marriage until the second pregnancy. She was four months expecting and full of joy at the thought of another child. But he'd come straight to her bed from a whorehouse and infected her with gonorrhea. The foetus died and she was ill for weeks, rendered infertile.

He begged for forgiveness but she had none, the rift between them was too immense to repair.

Donalda stood up and clasped her hands together tightly in an unconscious gesture of prayer. Last summer Owen had cried too, his face streaked with tears, his nose running with snot as if he were five years old again. He'd used the same words - "It will never happen again" - but she knew it had. She wanted to deny the truth, to pretend that a marriage to

Harriet Shepcote would make all the difference, but after today she knew it would not.

Suddenly she felt in need of comfort so intensely it was a pain in her chest. Owen had left the house at the same time as the detective, using Murdoch as a screen against her anger. Cyril had gone somewhere too, walking out into the winter night as if the darkness could bring him solace. The pale face of her stableboy came to her mind, and with a blind instinct to ease her own pain in the worse anguish of another, she decided to go to him.

A shawl clutched tightly around her head against the bitter cold, she hurried across the snow-covered yard. She hadn't been able to set foot in the stable since the summer but as she entered, the smell of horse and straw thrust the memory upwards.

At first she had not been able to see clearly, coming into the stable from the sunlit yard. Then she saw the two of them. They were lying in the fresh hay, their naked bodies glowing white in the gloom. Initially she'd mistaken the sounds for moans of pain. Then Owen became aware of her and looked over his shoulder, horror on his face.

She lifted her lantern high and as the light struck the horse's head, his eyes gleamed golden. He was placidly chewing his hay but he stamped with his rear leg and shifted. She hesitated, then called out.

"Joe? Joe, are you in here? It's Mrs. Rhodes."

There was a thump overhead, the sound of footsteps, and Joe's face appeared in the opening at the top of the ladder. He looked so frightened Donalda's heart went out to him, and she spoke kindly.

"Joe, I'd like to talk to you. I've come to see how you are."

He turned in order to come down the ladder but Donalda stopped him.

"Wait. I'll come up."

He shook his head.

"Why not?"

He started to gesture with his hands.

"You can speak, Joe. You have already."

He gulped, then spoke so softly she could hardly hear him.

"'Tisn't tidied up or anything."

"Don't be foolish, I'm not the house matron."

Joe flinched.

"Come and hold the lantern for me," she said more gently.

He clambered down a few rungs and she handed him the light. Then, gathering up her skirt, she climbed awkwardly up to the loft and stood on the upper rung of the ladder, her head thrust through the opening. Joe moved backwards to the wall, the lantern waving in his hand. He had to bend his head to stand upright because it wasn't a room really, just a space under the eaves. There was a narrow bed made up neatly, with a small wooden crate beside it and a wicker chair. It could have been a passageway in somebody's house. Donalda gazed around in dismay. How could she not know he lived like this?

"You keep it very tidy, Joe."

"I do it like we was taught, ma'am."

The lantern was throwing up long shadows against the walls and his face was in darkness, but his fear was rank in the confined area.

"Help me up, Joe."

"Not much room."

"That's all right. I'll sit."

"Better I come down, missus."

He flapped his hand at her the way you do to shoo away chickens.

"What are you hiding?"

"Nothing, missus."

"Come over here." She was perched uncomfortably at the edge of the trapdoor. Slowly he moved towards her, revealing a metal-bound square box behind him. A tiny cross as if on an altar was balanced against the wall.

"What is that?" she pointed.

"Nothing, missus."

"Shine the light there."

"It ain't nothing."

"Do as I say, Joe."

Reluctantly he obeyed, lowering the lantern.

"Give it to me."

He did so, his hand shaking.

"Did this belong to Theresa?"

"Yes, missus."

"Where did you get it?"

Wordlessly, he pointed downwards.

"Use words, Joe."

He hung his head and muttered, "Can't say."

"Look at me. Come on, raise your head. That's better. Now listen. I promise you will not be punished. I know you haven't done anything bad."

She spoke confidently but she felt ill. The crucifix lay cool and heavy in her hand. The Christ figure was made of silver, the cross ebony wood. Joe saw her distress and became even more afraid. She tried to smile to reassure him.

"You must tell me, Joe. Where did you find this?"

Again he pointed down below and whispered.

"In the carriage."

"What? I don't understand."

"Things fall out, money and bits, so I always checks out the seats. I'm sorry, missus, I should've -"

"Never mind that now. What carriage? Who does it belong to? Whose is it, Joe?"

Chapter Nineteen

Neither of them were aware of her. There was a peephole in the door between the butler's pantry and the dining room so the servants could determine the progress of the meal. The door was solid oak covered with baize and intended to block out sound, so she could barely hear what they were saying. What she saw sickened her and filled her with such fear she could not move, held in place like a rabbit facing a ferret.

His shirtsleeve was rolled up and he had twisted a garter tight around his upper arm. The other man had his back to her but she knew who it was. He was holding a syringe aloft, checking the level of the brownish liquid it contained. He bent over and plunged the needle into the bulging vein in the crook of the other's elbow, and grinned as he winced.

When the syringe was empty he withdrew the needle, and the other man loosed the tight armband and rolled down his sleeve.

"Do you think that doxy told anybody else that she'd seen us pick up the girl?" he asked, flexing his arm to speed the drug's action.

"Course she did. The only thing looser than a whore's cunt is her tongue. If I know gits, she leaked everything to her chum."

"What shall we do, then?"

"I'll take care of it."

The other man was already having trouble concentrating as the opium took effect.

"W-what are you going to do?" he asked again, his tongue thick.

The second one didn't answer but busied himself replacing the syringe in a blue velvet box.

"Enjoy yourself," he said.

"Where are you ... going?"

"To take care of the tell-me-when."

"No ... wait ... you mustn't ..."

“No? Are my lugs hearing right? Does my squab have a conscience?” He looked down at the man, whose head was now lolling on his chest. “Don’t worry, you and her will soon meet in Paradise. Just what you’ve always wanted.”

He grinned at his own joke. Even as the drug pulled him into the Shadow, the man understood. He raised his hand feebly but could do nothing. It was too late.

The man turned to leave, faster than she could move, faster than she expected, so that the door actually banged into her as he pushed it open.

He caught her by the arm before she could run.

“Didn’t I tell you, curiosity killed the cat,” he spat at her, pinching her arm so viciously she cried out.

“Well, my little pullet, you’ve really gerried yourself this time, haven’t you?” he said.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 15

THE YEOMAN CLUB WAS NOT OSTENTATIOUS or well situated like some of the clubs and lodges in the city. The Oddfellows owned a huge chateau of a building on Carlton Street, which was a boast to the world about their wealth. The National Club had a good address on Bay Street. The Yeoman had neither of these. It had been founded fifteen years earlier by a rich brewer who acquired a cheap piece of land at the south end of River Street. In spite of the location, he enticed a significant membership by donating his superb wine cellar, sparing no expense in the decor and, above all, affording complete privacy.

The three-storey building itself was plain, with a flat facade of red brick, the only ornamentation some yellow medallions beneath the cornice and two columns of expensive Italian marble that flanked the door.

By the time he reached the club, Murdoch was footsore and his face was burning with the cold. The wind was fierce and the snow was building up on the sidewalks, making walking difficult. River Street was a working-class area not

fully populated, and there were only a few lights dotting the darkness. At the Yeoman Club a low gas lamp shone outside but the windows were curtained and unwelcoming. Only those in the know would seek out the place.

He tugged on the bellpull and the door was opened at once by a liveried footman. He hesitated, trying to assess the detective's status. Not a tradesman, but not a guest nor likely to be. Murdoch was used to this attitude but never reconciled. He stared back at the footman and coolly presented his card.

"I'd like to have a word with the steward, if you please."

"That'll be Mr. Keene. He's in his office."

"I'll wait inside, then, while you fetch him. It's maundy cold out here."

Reluctantly, the footman stepped aside to let him in. Then, the card held in his fingertips as if it were dipped in shit, he went off.

Murdoch gazed around curiously at the spacious vestibule. There was a log fire blazing in the big fireplace, two fine brocade armchairs facing it and at their feet a tiger-skin rug, fierce head intact, the long teeth bared, ready to bite the unwary. The carpet was a thick Persian, the wallpaper red and green flock, and soft light filtered through porcelain sconces. Murdoch walked cautiously around the tiger's head to warm his hands at the fire. Above the mantel were two framed pictures. One was of Her Majesty holding her orb and sceptre, the other a daguerreotype of a stout man with abundant white whiskers and small eyes. The brass plate declared this was Mr. Lothar Reinhardt, the generous founder and benefactor of the Yeoman Club. Beneath his portrait was a printed declaration of the aims and purpose of the club:

... to defend and protect our native land against the encroachment of undue influence from our southern neighbours, to wit the United States

of America. To sustain and support our undying loyalty to the throne of England, Her Majesty Queen Victoria and her descendants.

He turned his back to the fire, lifting his coat to get some heat to his cold buttocks. In the centre of the vestibule was a white marble sculpture on an ebony pedestal. It depicted Diana, breasts naked, half woman, half deer, fleeing from her own hounds. The terror carved on the goddess's face made him think of Alice fleeing across the frozen lake.

"Mr. Murdoch. What can I do for you?"

The footman had reappeared, and behind him was a tall man, with grizzled hair cut short. He was dressed in cutaway black jacket and grey trousers, and an immaculate white cravat was at his throat. He had the stiff bearing of a soldier, accentuated by the empty left sleeve of his jacket, which was pinned to his broad chest. Murdoch gaped, recognizing him immediately, but the steward spoke first.

"My name is Keene. Perhaps we should talk in my office. Forsyth, see we are not disturbed."

"Yes, sir." The footman's face was as expressionless as a dummy's. Only the bright curiosity in his eyes gave him away. He stepped back into immobility beside the entrance.

"This way," said the steward. Murdoch followed him into a wide passageway with closed, leather-covered doors along either side. All of them sported mahogany plaques which stated, variously, LIBRARY, SMOKING ROOM, BILLIARD ROOM. The man opened the door labelled STEWARD'S OFFICE and ushered Murdoch inside.

It was actually a sitting room, luxuriously appointed, with a Turkish couch in plush velour and two brown leather chairs. The draperies were chenille and the Axminster carpet thick enough to go to bed on. A massive walnut desk against one wall was the only visible concession to business. There was a blazing fire in the hearth here as well.

The steward closed the door and the two men faced each other. Both broke into broad smiles of delight.

“Willie, my boyo, it’s so good to see you again.”

Murdoch pulled him into a hug, thumping him hard on the back. “It didn’t seem like it back there. What’s this ‘My name is Keene’ stuff?”

“I apologize, Will. I for sure didn’t mean to slight you. Gave me quite a shock to receive your card, I can tell you.” His Irish brogue was thicker with his excitement. “Truth is I changed my name for practical reasons. I wanted this crib and I suspected that a man named John Keene, Methodist, rather than Sean Kelly, hardened Papist, would be more acceptable to the fat culls.”

Murdoch grimaced. “From what I’ve seen so far, you were probably right.”

Kelly stepped back and gave Murdoch an affectionate punch in the arm. “You’re fit as a fiddle, I see. Here, now. Let me take your coat and hat. Thank you kindly for being so quick on the uptake and not letting on. Forsyth’s a toad-eater if ever there was one. He’d have tattled on me for sure.”

Murdoch regarded him, smiling. “Now let me have a gander at you.”

Kelly’s features were broad and flat, and childhood smallpox had made him cribbage-faced. The general effect was rather sinister. But Murdoch knew, in spite of his appearance, he was a decent man of fierce loyalty and honour. They’d known each other at the lumber camp twelve years before, where Kelly was the manager and Murdoch a young chopper.

“You’ve not changed a speck.”

The steward chuckled. “If you think that, it’s sure your own eyesight in what’s changed.” He patted his stomach. “Fifteen more pounds. I married a widow lady last year and she’s been doing her best to fatten me up like I was a prize

steer worth more by the pound. Lots of bread and potatoes in there."

"So somebody finally snared you?"

"True. A man likes some comfort in his old age. She's a lovely little thing, plump and sweet as a nut with a nice nest egg to boot." He pulled up a chair for Murdoch. "I'd heard up at the camp you'd joined the bulls."

"Were you surprised?"

"Not me. Some of the choppers thought you'd turned your coat, but those as knew you, including meself, said it was good a man as straight as you was looking after law and order."

Murdoch was pleased. He'd always valued the older man's good opinion.

"You're looking perishing, Willie. Let me get you a drop to warm you up? I've got nothing but the best."

He went over to a high bookcase that lined one wall, reached up and pulled out a strip of blank books. A small liquor cabinet was behind.

"Am I to assume you've come about the young colleen that died last week? A young lump of a lad was here asking questions before."

Murdoch nodded. "Something else has happened ... Ever know a woman named Alice Black?"

"Never."

Kelly took a bottle of Glenmorangie, tucked it under his arm and pulled out the cork with his teeth. He got out a crystal glass and poured Murdoch a finger of scotch.

"None for you?"

"No. Minnie made me take the Pledge before we married. The drink made me a hothead all my life. I'm better without it."

He sniffed at the scotch like a besotted man smells his absent mistress's gown. "Beautiful! But go on, Will."

"Alice Black was a prostitute. We found her strangled down near Cherry Beach on Thursday morning."

“Did you now? What a terrible thing.”

Murdoch raised his glass. “May the road always rise before you and may you ever have the wind at your back.” He took a sip, rolling the silky liquor around his tongue before swallowing.

“Alice might have been offed by a Tom in a rage, but I think it’s too much of a coincidence. She stole the clothes from Therese’s dead body. I’m wagering she knew something she shouldn’t have and was conveniently dispatched to the Grand Silence.”

“What can I do to help, Will?”

“Two of the men who were connected with the first girl are members of the Yeoman Club.”

“Alderman Shepcote is, and your constable already asked me about him. He was here on that Saturday night. I saw him meself. Came about ten, left at twelve. Who’s the other buck?”

“Dr. Cyril Rhodes. Do you know him?”

“For sure. A little cull. Forever tripping over his own tongue when he talks.”

“That’s the one. He claims he was here on Wednesday night.”

“Does he now? I didn’t see him meself, but we can ask Forsyth. He could have booked one of the private chambers.”

“What are they?”

“Four rooms at the back where the members can stay if they’re too tired or too full to go home. Or if they want to do some private entertaining.”

“Gigglers?”

“On occasion. Not always. Might be some special business.”

“Is the doctor the sort of man who’d pay for his pleasures?”

Kelly hesitated. “I’ve only been here a month, Willie. It’s not a thing I would know.”

“His wife spat it out like a fishwife, but then they both shut up tighter than a pair of clams. ‘Oh, I didn’t mean nothing by it,’ says she. ‘Oh, I’d never do anything so wicked,’ says he. Liars both of you, says I. Anyway, he claims he was here on the night of Alice Black’s murder and at his consulting rooms when Therese Laporte died.” He put down his empty glass. “How about showing me these nice private rooms?”

Kelly nodded. “We can go the back way.”

“Can’t have the members running into a police officer, can we? What’d they think?”

The steward grinned, shamefaced. “That’s the truth of it, Will. And sooner or later they’d get around to blaming me.”

He led the way down the hall and through a heavy door to a narrow, uncarpeted passageway. At the far end was a second door, and this opened into another wider hall with thick carpeting and rich flock wallpaper. There were four doors on one side.

Kelly opened the first one. Rather to Murdoch’s surprise, at first appearance this room was quite plain. It was only when you looked a little closer that you could see the excellent quality of the furnishings. Around the marble fireplace were grouped two armchairs and a sofa, all upholstered in brown suede leather. The tables and sideboard were cherrywood, the lamps fine porcelain. Above the fireplace was a large gilt-edged mirror and, to one side, another portrait of Her Majesty Queen Victoria. On each of the side walls were reproductions of celebrated oil paintings, all depicting royal occasions: the young queen in a white gown addressing Parliament, the wedding of the Prince of Wales to Princess Alexandra of Denmark and so on. Opposite was a beige felt curtain, to the right a louvred door and to the left, double doors.

Murdoch pointed. “Where do they lead?”

Kelly went over and pulled open the double doors. Behind them was a put-away bed.

“Do ye want me to take it down?”

“Not at the moment. And there?”

“That’s the crapper room. The water closet.”

Murdoch went to have a look. In the small alcove behind the louvred door was a washbasin fitted with brass faucets, a deep bathtub and an oaken water closet. Curious, Murdoch pulled on the chain and watched as the water came swooshing down into the porcelain bowl, swirled and disappeared.

“The members certainly have all the modern conveniences, don’t they?”

“That’s what they pay for.”

Murdoch walked over to the felt curtain. “Is this the back door?”

“That’s it.”

He drew back the curtain, which smelled of cigars. There was a door behind it, an iron key in the lock. As he opened it a rush of cold air hit his face. He was facing directly onto a laneway. It looked just wide enough for a carriage and had been well used, the ground showing many overlays of wheels. When he leaned out, he could see there was a service bay to his left where tradesmen could bring their carts.

He closed the door, let the curtain drop and stepped back into the room, dusting some of the light snow from his shoulders.

“The members could easily come and go without being seen if they used the laneway.”

“That’s the idea.”

“Is there any way to know if Rhodes used this room?”

Kelly thought for a moment, then slapped himself on the forehead. “May I be taken without shrift for my sins if I’m not an idiot ... We have chits. The members like it better. They simply sign for their drinks and meals as they have them and pay their accounts at the end of the month. Each chit is stamped. It makes settling up with the waiters easier. I’ll fetch them.”

While he waited, Murdoch examined the room. The books in the walnut glass-fronted case were properly sober and edifying. There was a beautifully illustrated volume of *Master Thoughts in Poem, Prose and Pencil*, which he'd recently seen in McKenney's Bookshop on Yonge and had coveted. He replaced it carefully and opened the doors of the walnut sideboard. It was empty except for two new packs of cards and a blank notepad. For a moment he was disappointed, but he checked himself. What had he expected? A box of French letters? Syringes and hookah pipe?

The lavatory also revealed nothing personal. A razor, a soapdish and brush and thick satin-damask towels were provided. There was no indication whatsoever in this tastefully furnished room of the kind of activity that Kelly had hinted at.

He sat down in one of the armchairs, sinking back into the soft upholstery. He could see himself sitting there, his crystal glass of Glenmorangie beside him, his leather-bound book of *Master Thoughts* at his elbow.

Kelly returned. "Hey, Willie me boyo, you look right at home. Perhaps one day ye'll be a Yeoman yerself."

"Sure. And one day we'll be able to live on the moon. Come on, what've you got?"

The steward was carrying a stack of papers speared on a metal spike. He pulled half of them off and gave them to Murdoch.

"You take those. They're all the chits for the last week. These rooms are referred to as the Cabinet Section. This particular one is called the Gladstone. The others are the Peel, the Wellington and the Disraeli. Sometimes the waiters will note which particular room they're serving and sometimes they don't."

He held the papers down with his thumb and started to leaf through them. Murdoch followed suit. Many of the signatures were of prominent men. The Yeoman Club

admitted only the most eminent of Toronto's Christian citizens.

After a few minutes, Kelly said, "Will you stick to the job at hand? You're oohing and aahing like a chambermaid at a banquet."

"It's interesting to the policeman in me ... Alderman Blong ordered *four* magnums of Champagne?"

"He was entertaining his fellow councilmen."

"Speaking of which, here's a chit for McDonough. He's our medical officer."

"Good man?"

"Let's say the colonel likes him because he's very efficient." He imitated the doctor putting his ear to a man's chest. "'Hmm, Constable, sounds like the Don River in there. But nothing to worry about. I don't want to keep a young swell like you off the beat. Get yourself some goose grease, rub it on your chest and wear a flannel vest. Next!'"

Kelly laughed. "I know the kind. In the camp it was sheer luck who came in the door first, the physician or the undertaker. But that bill belongs to Hugh McDonough, the doctor's sprig. He's a regular here. He and his friends."

There was a curious tone to Kelly's voice.

"Don't you care for him?"

The steward shrugged. "The Good Lord made many species of animal for his ark."

"He was in one of the Cabinet rooms on Saturday. He must have had guests, unless he's in training to oust the Fat Man at the Exhibition. Two magnums of hot Champagne and a quart of fresh oysters. No, two quarts of oysters."

"He always has company. He has a passion for cards and he's here 'til all hours. I don't know when he does his learning. He's supposedly studying medicine himself, God help us."

"So's the Rhodes scion. Is he a member here?"

"No. Just his father."

"Ever see him? Redhead, lathy build, nobby dresser."

"Can't say I have." Suddenly, Kelly jumped up. "Here we go. Dr. Rhodes ordered a glass of Harvey's cream sherry on Wednesday night. Let's see, that was Humphrey's shift too, which means it was early on in the evening. The man went home with a digestive problem, so I know. Me suspicion is he tipples, but I've yet to catch him."

"Who, Rhodes?"

"No, you daft boyo, the waiter Humphrey."

"Rhodes says he came here about seven o'clock. Do the waiters enter the room when they bring the drinks?"

"Not without permission. They are told to knock and place the tray outside the door."

"So we can't know if the doctor was alone or not."

"No, not unless the waiter overheard someone. Ye're thinking of a female person, I presume?"

Murdoch nodded. He finished his pile. "There's nothing else, and he says he was here from early evening until the next morning. What was he eating, snow?"

"Regrettably that doesn't prove anything. He could have gone to the dining room and somebody else paid his meal."

"Did you see him?"

"No, but I was in my office a lot of the time."

"Sean, I'm going to have to ask questions."

"They won't like it, Will. Be careful, me friend. These aren't your usual nocky piss-makers. These are the Uprights. You've got to be very sure of yourself or you're the one who'll get it."

"I'm aware of that." Murdoch sighed. "Unfortunately, we're not much further forward. We've confirmed Rhodes was here at the club Wednesday evening but there is no proof that he stayed the night. And even if he did, it's possible to come and go from these rooms without being seen. He could have slipped off, met Alice Black, killed her and been back to enjoy a good night's sleep with nobody the wiser. We've nothing for Shepcote, but he said he was at home, anyway."

Murdoch leaned back in his chair, lacing his fingers behind his head. He was tired and he hadn't had anything to eat all day. Maybe Sean could stand him a dish of oysters or a plate of roast beef. His friend must have read his mind.

"Come on back to my office. This is a quiet time of the evening. I can order us some lamb chops. The cook is excellent, as you can imagine."

"All right. But let me see the other rooms first."

"What are you looking for?"

"I don't know. A ghost to talk to me maybe."

Kelly replaced the chits on the spike and led the way to the adjoining room. The plaque on the door said WELLINGTON but this room differed from the Gladstone only in the choice of wall covering, which was brown, and the oil paintings, which were all military: the Zulu attack on the garrison at Roke's Drift, General Gordon making his last stand at Khartoum.

Murdoch walked around but the room was unrevealing.

"Satisfied?" Kelly asked.

He nodded, about to leave, when his eye was caught by the double doors that hid the bed. They were not totally closed. He went over and opened them up. The bed behind wasn't completely flush with the wall.

"How do I get this down?"

Kelly came over and grabbed a lever at the side. With a hard tug, he pulled the bed down.

The cloth valise had been stuffed underneath the mattress. Murdoch snapped open the bag. Women's clothes. A Bible was sitting on top of the grey jacket and he took it out. Inside was an inscription. *À ma soeur, Therese Laporte. Avec amour. Claudette.*

He felt a flood of white-hot anger.

"Sean, I want to know who was in this room on Saturday last. I'm going to question every fat cull, and they can have

my arse on a bandbox for all I care.”

As Murdoch started to replace the clothes in the valise there was a sharp rap at the door. Kelly answered it. The imperturbable Forsyth stood there. He made a quick attempt to look over the steward’s shoulder but Kelly blocked him.

“Sorry to disturb you, sir, but there’s a lady to see you. She said it was a matter of great urgency. I took the liberty of placing her in your office, sir. The members, er, won’t have to, er, pass her in the hall.”

Women were not allowed into the inner sanctum of the club under any circumstances.

“Did she state her business?”

“No, sir.”

“Who is she?”

“She says her name is Rhodes, Mrs. Cyril Rhodes.”

Chapter Twenty

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 15

DONALDA RHODES WAS STANDING in front of the fire warming her hands, but she turned around quickly as the two men entered the room. When she saw Murdoch, she looked frightened. Kelly spoke first.

"Mrs. Rhodes, I'm the steward, John Keene, at your service."

"I wished to see my husband."

Murdoch interrupted. "He isn't here, and frankly I'd like to locate him myself."

"Why is that, Mr. Murdoch? I thought you had all the information you required."

She spoke haughtily and even though he knew it was a facade, he was irritated. Fed up with the lot of them.

"Mrs. Rhodes, we have found Therese's valise. It was hidden in one of the rooms."

"I see."

"You can understand the importance of this discovery. Either the girl was brought here or at the very least somebody from this club was with her in the last hours of her life."

For a moment she appeared to be searching for some denial, an explanation that would remove the danger from her own house. Then she sat down on the edge of the chair by the desk, her back ramrod straight as if she needed to hold herself upright.

She took the ebony cross out of her pocketbook and handed it to Murdoch.

"I believe this is from Theresa's rosary."

"Where did you get it, ma'am?"

"Joe found it in a carriage. He is in the way of fishing down the seats for stray coins and he discovered this."

"Whose carriage would that be, then, ma'am?"

Donalda hesitated, glancing over at Kelly, who was hovering awkwardly near the door.

"Would you rather I left?" he asked.

She considered him. "It doesn't really matter. It will all come out soon, anyway."

"Whose carriage, ma'am?" Murdoch prompted.

"Miss Harriet Shepcote's. She came to Birchlea on Tuesday last, and that's when he found it." She met Murdoch's gaze. "He only showed it to me just now ... I am sure he is telling the truth, Mr. Murdoch."

He tapped the crucifix lightly in his palm. "Why did you come to the club, Mrs. Rhodes, and not directly to the police station?"

"I hoped my husband would be here. Frankly I felt the need to speak to him. Please believe me, I had every intention of informing you, but I'm sure you can understand my concern. Miss Shepcote is quite closely connected with our family ... We are hoping for an engagement between her and my son."

Murdoch understood perfectly. Donalda wanted to be fully prepared if scandal was going to burst over their heads. "The girl would make a pact with the Devil if Owen asked her to," were the words Edith Foy had used.

Donalda stood up. "May I offer you the use of my carriage, Mr. Murdoch? It is waiting outside. I'm sure there is some urgency to speak to Miss Shepcote."

She was right. "Thank you, ma'am. That will be most helpful."

"I will accompany you. No, please, Mr. Murdoch, my presence could be an asset."

She was right about that too. He didn't want to be in the position of dealing with an unchaperoned young woman,

especially if he was going to arrest her.

Behind Donald, Kelly beckoned. "Can I have a word?"

Murdoch went closer.

"Willie, let me come too. You might need some help."

"Sean, I can't do that. This is police business."

"You don't have time to get more officers and you've no idea what you're likely to encounter. You don't want the culprit to slip through your fingers, do ye now?"

"What about the club?"

"It's practically my teatime. I can leave for a while."

Kelly's scarred face was as eager as a boy's. Murdoch smiled.

"All right. Do you have any objection to Mr. Keene accompanying us, Mrs. Rhodes?"

"Not at all, but please, let's hurry."

The Rhodes carriage was waiting at the entrance to the club, and Joe Seaton was huddled into a rug on the driver's seat. He was already dusted with snow, which increased his look of pale wretchedness. While Donald got inside with Kelly, Murdoch climbed up next to the boy.

"Do you know where the Shepcote house is?"

He nodded.

"Off as fast as you can, then. Go along Queen Street. It's been cleared."

Joe cracked his whip and the grey horse set off at a smart canter.

They reached Berkeley Street in ten minutes flat. The house was at the end of a row of four, all trimly gabled with deep bay front windows. The other three houses were warm with lamplight, but the Shepcote house was completely dark. Murdoch was about to jump down when Joe caught him by the arm.

"I want to do something for Tess."

"I'm sure you do, lad -"

Joe interrupted him. "I'll fight anybody if I have to."

Murdoch patted his hand. "The best thing you can do at the moment is stay here with the carriage. We're going inside. If you see anybody leave, man or woman, run in and tell me."

"Y-yes, sir."

The other two were already on the sidewalk, and as Murdoch joined them, Donaldda pointed. "The door is open."

"Please wait here, ma'am."

She shook her head. Murdoch didn't want to waste time arguing, but Kelly touched her on the arm.

"Stand behind me, then, if you please."

Because of his disability, he wore a long cape, a dramatic affair of black wool, and he had shrugged both edges over his shoulder, freeing his arm. Murdoch saw that he had also unpinned his left sleeve, which hung down at his side. He was ready for action.

At the threshold Murdoch tugged on the bell, and they could hear the clang in the silent house. At the same time he pushed the door open further. It led into a wide hall, which was in darkness. They waited a moment but there was no response in the house.

Murdoch took a box of lucifers from his pocket and lit the candle in the wall sconce. It gave off sufficient light to reveal velvet portieres on the right and a staircase directly in front. A closed door at the far end no doubt led to the kitchen.

"What's wrong?" whispered Donaldda at his elbow. "Why is no one here?"

"Please stay here, Mrs. Rhodes. Kelly, come with me."

This time she obeyed. She looked frightened.

There was an oil lamp on one of the hall tables and Murdoch lit that as well, holding it aloft.

At the drawing room, he pulled back the drawn portieres.

The light shone on the prone figure of Harriet Shepcote, who was lying on the sofa, facing the back. Murdoch went over to the girl. To his relief she wasn't dead as it had first

appeared, only very still. Her breathing seemed shallow but not laboured, and when he touched her face the skin temperature felt normal. This close the smell of liquor was strong. Gently, he started to shake her by the shoulder.

"Miss Shepcote. Miss Shepcote ... it's Detective Murdoch."

She didn't move, but he saw her eyes flutter slightly.

"Sean, help me sit her up."

He slipped his arm beneath the girl and at that moment Donalda entered.

"I couldn't just ... What's wrong?"

"I think she's intoxicated. Perhaps you could call to her."

They got her upright, but her head lolled back against the couch. Donalda knelt down beside her.

"Harriet. Harriet, wake up."

The girl moved slightly but didn't open her eyes. Donalda took a quick breath, then with one swift movement slapped her hard across the cheek. Harriet gasped in shock and her eyes opened.

"Harriet, look at me."

The young woman's eyelids fluttered, but her head started to droop again. Another slap.

"Wake up, Harriet. You must wake up!"

This time she took in the three of them, and suddenly her face crumpled and she started to cry, a soft mewling sort of sound like a baby's. She tried to shrink away from the encircling arm of Sean Kelly.

"I'll hold her," said Donalda. She eased herself onto the sofa and put her arms around the girl. Harriet was trembling and moaning and her voice was barely audible.

"Let me go to sleep. I'm tired. Please let me go to sleep."

Murdoch spoke. "Miss Shepcote. Don't be afraid. You're safe now. What has happened? Where is your father?"

The question seemed to frighten her even more, and she huddled into the older woman's bosom, burying her face as if she were a babe in arms. Donalda stroked her hair, trying to soothe her. Murdoch was glad she had insisted on

coming. Whatever had happened to Harriet Shepcote, he didn't think drunkenness was familiar to her. He indicated to Donalda to ask the question again.

"Harriet, try to tell us what is wrong."

"Don't let him marry me, Mrs. Rhodes. Please, I can't ..."
Her voice started to rise.

Donalda looked afraid but she said kindly, "Of course you don't have to marry anybody if you don't want to, my dear."

Harriet shuddered and gulped back a sob. "He forced me to drink ... to celebrate our wedding. He told me ... he told me."

She couldn't continue. Donalda's face was grim.

"Where is Owen now?"

Harriet looked up at her, bewildered. "Owen? I don't know ... Oh, Mrs. Rhodes, I don't mean Owen."

"Who, then, Harriet? Who are you talking about?"

It was hard to hear what she said, but Murdoch could just make it out.

"Canning ..."

"Your coachman?" Donalda asked in astonishment.

Harriet could only nod.

Murdoch leaned closer, speaking as gently as he could. "Miss Shepcote, where is your father?"

"In the ... dining room ... Oh, Mrs. Rhodes, what am I going to do?" Her voice began to rise again.

Donalda held her closer, rocking her. Even through her concern, her relief was palpable. "It's all right, my dear child. He won't have you. We won't let him. Hush now."

Murdoch signalled to Kelly. "We're going to find Mr. Shepcote, Mrs. Rhodes."

There was an archway from the drawing room to the dining room and the chenille curtains were closed. They went through.

The dining room was lit dimly by a single guttering candle on the table, and the embers from a dying fire threw a

reddish glow over everything. They saw a man slumped in the armchair close to the hearth. It was Shepcote.

He was breathing noisily and his arms hung limply beside the chair. Closer, in his lamplight, Murdoch could see his colour was bad, a bluish tinge around his lips.

"What is it, Willie? Is he drunk?" asked Kelly.

Murdoch indicated the empty vial on the nearby table and the open syringe box.

"Not drunk."

"He doesn't look so good."

Murdoch held the lamp close to Shepcote's face. He pulled up the lid of the right eye. The pupil was hugely dilated.

"Damnation. Sean, get to the kitchen and make up an emetic. Fast as you can."

Murdoch quickly extinguished the candle that was on the table and held the wick close to Shepcote's nostrils. The acrid smell filled the air but the man didn't stir. Murdoch slapped him hard back and forth across his cheeks and shook him. Nothing. A dribble of saliva was running from the corner of his mouth.

Donalda came through the portieres. Her voice was tight with urgency.

"Mr. Murdoch, I managed to get some story out of Harriet. She says she overheard her father and Canning talking together. Canning murdered that woman you found on the lake. Shepcote was a complicitor."

Kelly came back with a glass of mustard water in his hand.

Murdoch pulled back Shepcote's head and opened his mouth so that Kelly could pour some of the emetic down the man's throat. Shepcote gulped involuntarily but most of the liquid ran out the sides of his mouth. Donalda watched, her body tense and angry.

"Canning told Harriet her father was responsible for Theresa's death." She stared at Shepcote. "I want to hurt him. I want him to suffer likewise."

Suddenly she seized his shoulders and shook him hard. His head lolled to one side. Murdoch was about to restrain her, but she stopped herself.

"It won't do any good, though, will it? It won't bring her back."

"The law will deal with him ... if he survives that long."

Suddenly Donaldda caught Murdoch by the sleeve. "Harriet said something about Canning going after another woman - a friend of that dead girl's -"

"Ettie!"

"Can you stop him?"

"I'll try. Will you help Mr. Keene? Try to get Shepcote conscious. Do whatever it takes."

She shook her head. "I have to tend to Harriet first."

It was her punishment.

"Go, Will. I'll be all right," said Kelly. He started to administer more mustard water.

Murdoch left them to it and ran outside to the carriage. He jumped up beside Joe.

"Fast as you can, Joe. St. Luke's Street. SCORCH."

The boy cracked his whip over the horse and they plunged into a full gallop. Murdoch held on with one hand and with the other unhooked the side lantern and began to swing it.

"I wish I had a bell, but this'll have to do," he yelled at Joe. He stood up in the swaying driver's seat and, waving his lantern, bellowed at the top of his lungs.

"Out of the way! Police! Out of the way!"

Silver stretched out his neck and galloped like he'd never run before, Murdoch saying a Hail Mary under his breath that the horse wouldn't falter and that they'd get to Ettie in time.

Chapter Twenty-One

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 15

BERNADETTE WESTON YAWNED AND STRETCHED. Her shoulders were stiff and her eyes were tired. Trying to do fine sewing in candlelight wasn't easy, but she'd begged extra work from Mr. Webster so she could pay for Alice's funeral. Alice would be buried in style. Black horses to pull the hearse, a proper coffin, black crepe for the house, food after for the mourners. Some of the regulars at the O'Neil had passed the hat but they were such a bunch of piss-makers all she'd got out of it was two dollars and ten cents. Perhaps she should move away from here? Start afresh somewhere else? Who knew, maybe she could get out of the game and join a troupe or something. Everybody said she had a great voice.

She sewed the final stitch and broke off the thread with her teeth. She'd managed to repair half a dozen gloves in the last two days. Mr. Webster was a sour old macaroni, but he might advance her another couple of dollars on the next consignment. Bullocks had agreed to let her pay for the funeral in installments. And so they should, considering what they were charging. She and Alice had talked about belonging to the burial club but, more's the pity, they'd never got around to it. There was a pain in Ettie's throat. She missed Alice something sore. Who'd she have to joke with now? To chin over a pot of chatter broth? She clenched her teeth tight against the sob that was threatening to come up. After dropping off the gloves, she'd go over to the O'Neil for a gin and some company, try to forget for a while.

She tugged the glove off the wooden form and dropped it in the bag with the others. Then she stood up, yawning

again. She'd better hurry. Mr. Webster said he'd wait until eight o'clock for the gloves and he'd never stay a minute longer. Bugger, it was a quarter to, now. She grabbed her jacket and shawl off the peg, blew out the candle and tucked the bag under her arm.

At Quinn's room she paused for a second, but there was no light under the door and no sound from Princess. They must be out.

Outside, a light, steady snow was falling and the backyard was clean and white. Ettie wrapped her shawl tightly around her head and shoulders as she trudged down the path and into the laneway. Opposite the house, the police rope blew in the wind, still marking off the spot where Therese Laporte had died. That seemed so long ago now. What she and Alice done was wrong, and look where it had got them. They didn't have the clothes and Alice was dead. Perhaps there really was an angry God up there punishing them like the preachers shouted on the street corner.

She was walking as quickly as she could, but the snow was untouched and slowed her down. Sod it! Webster never waited. She turned out onto Sackville Street.

"Ellie, Ellie, hold on a minute."

Wrapped in her shawl and in the darkness of the laneway, she hadn't seen the man following her. He was wearing a long greatcoat and wide hat and it was only when he was close and pulled the muffler from his face that she recognized him.

"You're a bloody racehorse," he said, panting a little. "Where's the fire?"

"You! Get away from me."

She went to run but he grabbed her by the arm. "Hold on. What's up with you?"

"You know sodding well. You done in Alice."

"What you talking about?"

She struggled to get free but he held on.

"Let go of me. I'll start yelling in a minute."

"Come on, woman. I don't know what you're talking about."

"Alice left with you that night and got herself strangled."

He gave her a hard shake. "Ellie. Listen to me. I didn't do anything."

"Why should I believe you?"

She couldn't move out of his grip. "Because it's the truth, you dumb git."

"Don't call me that. And me name's Ettie. Bernadette to you."

"Beg pardon!" He set her free but stood close. "Listen, Miss Trim and Topper, your chum did leave with me and we were all set to go off and have a good bit of jig. Then some swell went past in his carriage. He stopped and without so much as a wink or a wave, she jumped in and off they went."

Ettie stared at him, trying to determine if he was lying or not, but his pugilist's face was impossible to read in the shadows.

"What sort of carriage was it?"

"Nobby, reddish colour."

"Was the horse light?"

"I think so, a bay maybe or a grey. Why? D'you know him?"

Ettie bit on her lip. That was the description that Alice had given of the carriage she'd seen on Saturday. It made sense that it was the same one. Sod it. Had Alice been so stupid as to get in? She probably thought she could put the squeeze on the man. Angry tears sprang to her eyes. What a foolish ignorant tart she was.

"D'you know the toff?" the sailor repeated.

Ettie shook her head.

"Listen, even the police believed me," he continued. "I got a visit from them yesterday. Every dick at the tavern must have given them a description of me going off with Alice -"

"What did the coppers look like?"

"One was a Goliath, seven feet at least. The detective was tall too, dark moustache. Fancied himself."

"No he don't. He's a good sort for a frog."

"Ha! Perhaps I should have said he fancies you. His eyes lit up like a gas lamp when he mentioned your name."

"Go on, that's horseshit if ever I smelled it."

"It's the truth, Ellie. He's quite cracked about you."

She shrugged, but she was pleased. "My God, what am I doing here dithering with you? I've got to deliver these gloves."

She set off again, heading for Queen Street, and the man kept pace.

"I was real sorry to hear about Alice. Here's something for the funeral." He pushed a folded five-dollar bill into her hand.

Ettie put it into her pocket. "Thanks."

"Can I stand you a pail and bin at the tavern when you've done your errand?"

"What?"

"An ale and gin."

"Throwing it around like a lord, aren't we?"

"There's only one better place I know of to put my money."

"And where's that?"

He touched her on the crotch. "Right in your duck hunt."

"Cheeky."

In fact, she didn't fancy him at all, but beggars couldn't be choosers. Maybe she could toss back enough gin to stomach him.

They were hurrying west along Queen Street to the tailor's shop. Like Alice, Ettie was afraid of the churchyard, but she didn't want the man to know that so she pulled her shawl like a blinker in front of her face and walked faster. She stopped in front of the shop, which was in total darkness.

"Sod it, he's gone. You've made me miss him." She banged hard on the door. "Mr. Webster? Mr. Webster?"

“Bugger, now I won’t get my money.”

“Maybe he’s upstairs.”

“Not him. That’s the workroom. He lives like a swell over on Jarvis Street.”

The store adjoining the tailor’s was vacant. Next to it was St. Paul’s churchyard, where the snow was slowly creeping up the old tombstones.

“Stay there a minute,” the man said. With a quick glance at the empty street he took a knife out of his pocket, opened one of the blades and inserted it between the lock and the doorframe. One quick thrust and the door jumped open.

“What’re you doing that for?” Ettie asked.

“Let’s see if he’s left any money. He owes you.”

Ettie hung back. “I’ll get in trouble. He’ll know it’s me.”

“No he won’t. There’s nobody to see. Come on, Ellie. I bet you’d like a bit of best satin for the funeral, wouldn’t you?”

He half pushed her into the dark front room of the shop, which was where Webster received his customers. There were two or three tailor’s dummies standing by the window, shrouded for the night in white sheets.

“Oi, they’re like bloody ghosts,” she said.

“You don’t have to be scared of the dead, Ellie, only the living. Now let’s have a look-see. Where’s the cloth kept?”

“Upstairs.”

“Let’s go, then.” He placed his finger on her breast. “I want to see you just the way your own mother did.”

It was then that Ettie knew he meant to kill her.

Joe pulled up in front of the lodging house and Murdoch jumped down.

“Get to the station fast as you can. Tell them to send an ambulance to Shepcote’s house right away, and have the officer get two constables over here on the run. Speak to Sergeant Seymour.”

Joe whipped up the panting horse and galloped off.

Inside the dark hall Murdoch paused, listening. He didn't know if Canning was in here and he was afraid to jeopardize Ettie's life by acting too impulsively. The house was silent as the grave. Hoping against hope he wasn't too late, he crept down the hall. At Ettie's room he halted again. Nothing. With his lantern held high, he opened the door, almost afraid of what he might find. The room was empty, the bed tidy. A candle stub was on the shelf and he touched the wax. It was soft. She hadn't left that long ago.

At that moment he heard footsteps, and Quinn with Princess at his heel appeared in the doorway.

"Hey, what's going on here?" The baker looked alarmed. "Oh, Detective, it's you."

"Have you seen Ettie?" Murdoch demanded.

"No, I haven't. I just got back in myself. What's up?"

"I've good reason to think she's in serious danger."

"Lordy! How?"

"The same man who killed Alice wants to shut up Ettie -"

"The sailor?"

"He's not a sailor, he's a coachman by the name of Canning."

"The hell -"

"D'you think she's at the O'Neil?"

Quinn glanced around the room. "The bag's gone. She was sewing gloves for Webster, the tailor. She's probably gone to his shop."

"Where?"

"Queen Street, right beside St. Paul's Church."

"Come with me. We've got to hurry. Back door. She didn't go out the front."

They set off back down the hall, but suddenly Quinn stopped.

"Just a minute. Hold Princess, will you."

He thrust the twine into Murdoch's hand and dived into his own room, emerging immediately with another dog on a

thick leather leash.

"Good Lord, what's that?" asked Murdoch.

"He's an English bulldog. I thought he might come in useful. He's a mild-tempered fellow but he doesn't look it."

The dog stared up at Murdoch. There was a long stream of saliva dripping from his mouth, his prominent eyes were red-rimmed and the lower fangs protruded outside slobbery lips. His face looked as if he'd run into a door.

"You're right about that," said Murdoch. "He'd give Cerberus a fright. Belong to a friend, does he?"

"Er ... yes, as a matter of fact. His name's Tsar."

"Come on, then."

In the snow-filled yard, Ettie's footprints were clearly visible. The two men and the dogs hurried down to the laneway. Here another set of prints appeared, larger and wider. Murdoch retraced them a few paces. Canning had been standing behind the shed waiting.

They went on again. The dogs had picked up the sense of urgency and they trotted alongside obediently. Tsar sounded asthmatic but managed to keep up a brisk pace.

At the entrance to Sackville Street Murdoch stopped again.

"Canning caught up with her here." He pointed to the prints still visible. "They stood and talked. You can see the snow has melted farther down. There wasn't a fight. They set off again together."

"Would she have gone willingly?"

"The footsteps don't seem to waver at all, so I doubt she was being coerced at this point, anyway. We're right at Sackville Street and there's too much chance of him being seen."

They were jog-trotting down the street now and the few passersby regarded them curiously. In a few minutes the trail crossed to the south side of Queen Street.

"I was right. She's heading for Webster's shop," panted Quinn.

As they approached the graveyard, Quinn tapped Murdoch on the arm.

"That's the shop. Next one."

Murdoch slowed down to get his breath. The tailor's was the middle one of three, but the nearest was vacant and boarded up and the far one, a fancy goods shop, was in complete darkness.

"I think I saw a wink of light on the second floor," whispered Quinn. Murdoch stared upwards but saw nothing. However, the footprints they had been following led right into the doorway. None came out. Ettie was in there.

Two of his side teeth on the upper gum were heavy with gold fillings and she noticed that from time to time he tapped them with an air of satisfaction at his own prosperity. She wondered how he could afford gold teeth. His clothes were of good cloth too. It was the snake tattoo that spoiled the effect, peeking out from the cuff on his shirt, purple and malevolent.

Ettie wasn't aware of being afraid. Her mind had gone into a kind of detached clarity, working independently as if she were watching herself from afar. There was an inner voice commenting. *If she screams now, he will cut her throat right here ... Nobody is close enough to hear and it don't matter to him anyways. He'd do it and run off. Better to keep talking, distract him as long as possible. She's done that lots of times when she wanted the jigger to fall asleep before he docked inside her ... He don't seem in a hurry. He's excited, though, she can smell it ... but she can fool him. If he thinks she's just another nocky piece of cattle, he might let down his guard.*

The second floor of the shop was used for storage, and along the far wall were deep shelves stacked with rolls of fabric. There were two long tables in the centre where the

tailors did their cutting and at the end of each table was a large oil lamp. Canning lit one of them.

Somebody will see the light, said Ettie's inner voice. *The copper on his beat will investigate. She'll be safe soon. Sleeping in her own bed before she knows it.*

But Canning immediately pulled down the window blind and fastened it tight.

He walked over to the shelves and was fingering the different bolts of cloth.

"What's your real name?" she asked.

"You don't need to know, Ellie. Jack'll do."

"You're not a sailor, are you?"

He scowled. "Are we playing 'Forfeit' all of a sudden?"

She shrugged. *Careful, don't crack the egg*, her voice warned. "You seem too nobby for a sailor is all."

That seemed to please him. "I was one once. Not now. Now I'm a gentleman ... or as near as makes no difference."

So far he hadn't removed his coat or hat, which she took comfort from, but now he unwound his muffler. He looked different but she couldn't at first identify why. Then he removed his wide felt hat. Instead of the close-cropped pate she'd seen at the O'Neil, he sported a head of dark, smooth hair.

"Sod me, you've got hair."

"Sod me, but I haven't," he mocked. He tugged off the wig and tossed it to the floor, where it lay like a strange species of animal.

"Frigging thing's hot," he said. Next he removed his greatcoat and placed it on the workbench. "Why don't you get more cozy. I've never taken a flyer before and I don't fancy it now."

"I'm cold."

"I'll warm you up ... I said to take your jacket off."

The tone of his voice made Ettie's knees quiver. She licked her lips; her mouth was as dry as sand. "Don't happen to have a spot of soother with you, I suppose?"

"As a matter of fact I do." He took a silver flask from his pocket and handed it to her. "You *are* cold, Ellie."

"Ettie! I keep telling you my name's Ettie, from Bernadette."

"What's the difference?" he said.

She unscrewed the top from the flask and took a deep gulp of the liquor. It wasn't gin but something that burned her throat.

"Hey, leave some for me. That's expensive scotch you're swallowing like it was water."

The drink was a fire in her stomach, but every other part seemed to grow colder. In the distance she thought she heard a dog bark but in the room the silence grew deeper, as if her ears were stopping up. He stood, legs apart, contemplating the rows of fabrics. Then he suddenly and violently hauled out a big bolt of crimson satin. In the faint light of the lamp, the cloth was as dark as spilled blood.

"This'll do." He turned back to where Ettie was sitting on one of the wooden chairs at the table. "Didn't I say to take off your clothes? I can't stand gits who won't listen."

She flinched and with shaking fingers began to unbutton her jacket. In the meantime he rolled out the satin, making a pool of crimson on the grimy floor. Then without another word he walked over to her, gripped the back of her neck with one hand and with the other pulled at the collar of her blouse. A button tore off.

"Oi, what are you doing? This is my good waist." But her voice lacked conviction. Her beautiful detachment vanished and she was back in the stuffy room, the smell of new fabric intermingling with the stink of their sweat. Her arms ached as if she had been holding a heavy weight, and her legs had lost all strength. His face was very close to hers, his breath was foul, and she could see a small deep scar by his nostril as if a knife point had been driven in. His chin was rough with reddish hairs. His pale blue eyes looked at her but did not see. He grinned again and the gold tooth gleamed.

"I've made you a bed fit for a queen. Come on and try it."
She knew she'd lost.

—

Murdoch extinguished his lantern, relying on the jumping light of the nearest gas lamp. He couldn't risk being detected.

"Go around to the back and wait there," he said to Quinn.

"No, let me come. Ettie may need me."

Murdoch shook his head. The man was distraught and in that state might prove to be more hindrance than help.

"I need you to guard that door." He bent down and picked up a half-brick that was lying against the wall. "If he comes out, hit him."

"My pleasure."

Murdoch slipped off his seal coat and hat and placed it in the doorway, hoping they'd still be there afterwards.

"You take Princess and keep her quiet. Give me Tsar."

Quinn did as he was told. With the bulldog's leash in his hand, Murdoch entered the front room. There was a thin rush covering on the floor which effectively deadened the sound of his boots, but he wished he had some weapon. Then he heard a thump from above and the sound of heavy footsteps across the floor. They were up there.

He held Tsar's jaws closed so he could hear better. He made out two voices, one male, the other female. Relief swept through him as he realized she was alive. Quickly, he crossed to the rear door and as lightly and as fast as he could mounted the stairs, the dog beside him.

"You're going to crash me, aren't you?"

The words were out of her mouth before she could stop them. She felt dizzy but it was a relief to tell the truth. It gave her a strange kind of strength. He stared at her, then stepped away as if she'd violated an unspoken taboo.

"What a fly mort you really are, Ellie. I was wondering when that would occur to you."

This time a wave of anger shot through her body, burning hot but as brief and ineffective as the striking of a match.

"You did for Alice too, didn't you?"

"That's right. She was too leaky for her own good. She told you she saw us pick up the girl, didn't she?"

"Yes."

"So there we are, then, Ellie. Too bad for you."

He yawned like a nervous dog and for the first time she realized he was afraid too.

At that moment, she heard a sound from the landing, a creak.

He also heard it.

At the top of the stairs, Murdoch hesitated. The voices had ceased and everything was completely quiet. Slowly, he turned the doorknob. The door wasn't locked and yielded easily.

With a fervent prayer he flung it open and jumped into the room, dropping at once into a crouch.

Canning was waiting for him.

His left hand was covering Ettie's mouth and at her throat he was holding a short sailor's knife. He had pricked her skin and a trickle of bright blood was running down her neck. She was not struggling, but her eyes as they saw Murdoch were wide with terror and pleading.

"Let her go."

Canning scowled. "nothin' doing. She's my ticket of leave. Now get out of the way. I'm coming down those stairs."

Tsar licked his lips and whined softly, sensing the emotion.

"And don't think of letting that brute go 'cause I'll slit its throat right after I slit hers."

"Turn yourself in, man. You can't get away."

“Wrong. I was a sailor, don’t forget. I’ve got escape hatches you’ll never know about. Now move away. Over there! Now!”

Ettie flinched at his voice in her ear.

“Please,” she whispered.

Slowly Murdoch obeyed, trying to sense the moment of weakness, the moment when Canning would give him an opportunity to act. He regretted bringing the dog, who had suddenly sat down, panting. Mild-mannered fellow indeed. Unobtrusively he dropped the leash.

“Let go of the girl and I’ll give you time to get away.”

“The fig you would. Come on. Get over to the corner. If you don’t hurry up, I’ll start on her now.”

The blade dug deeper. Ettie gasped.

Suddenly from the stairs came a deep-throated baying. The door banged against the wall and Quinn burst into the room. Princess was at his heel, howling. Canning turned, momentarily distracted. At the same time, Ettie twisted out of his arm and dropped to all fours, scrambling away. Quinn ran over to help her but as he bent down Canning’s boot connected with his jaw, felling him instantly. With a howl, Princess went for the offending leg but Canning landed a blow on her side that flung her in the air. Murdoch lunged forward to grab him but he wasn’t fast enough. Canning jumped backwards behind a sewing machine, waving his knife in front of him. Ettie was screaming obscenities at the top of her voice as, still on her hands and knees, she crawled to the injured dog.

It was then that Tsar woke up. He growled deep in his throat, then hurled himself past Murdoch and went full-speed at Canning. The sailor tried to kick at him but the blow glanced off the dog’s shoulder. Tsar leapt on Canning’s right arm, clamping his jaws around the wrist. With a scream of pain, the man tried to punch the dog in the head with his other hand. He might as well have thumped a pillow for all the impact it had, but it gave Murdoch the chance he

needed. He caught hold of Canning's left arm and twisted it backwards, at the same time bearing down with all his weight.

They fell to the ground, the two men and the dog tumbling and rolling among the tables of the sewing room. Neither Tsar nor Murdoch would let go. Dimly he was aware of savage bumps as his spine and shins connected with the iron legs of the sewing tables. Canning was not a big man, but he was strong. Murdoch could not hold him down, and Canning managed to butt him so hard under the chin that Murdoch almost lost his grip. The din was horrific – Tsar was snarling ferociously non-stop, Ettie was screaming and Canning was yelling. Then Princess ran back into the fray, but she didn't distinguish between friend or foe and gave Murdoch a nasty bite on the calf. He tried to protect himself at the same time that he attempted to get his arm around Canning's neck. Then, with a Herculean heave, his assailant staggered to his feet. The bulldog hung on, his stubby paws waving in the air. Blood was streaming from Canning's arm.

"Get him off!" he screamed.

He swung around and Murdoch, who was still behind him, was almost crushed against the shelves. It was only the softness of the cloth bolts that saved him. Canning might have escaped, but at that moment the little hound moved in for another attack and got Canning right above his heel, severing the Achilles tendon. He fell to his knees and Murdoch rolled off to the side. The breath had been knocked out of him and he was gasping for air.

Canning was closer to Ettie and, seeing what was happening, she aimed a savage kick at his ribs, the pointed toe of her boot catching him in the solar plexus. He went white and fell flat on his stomach like a marionette whose strings were cut.

She would have gone on kicking but, panting, Murdoch managed to pull her off.

"Ettie, stop. Stop. Leave him to me."

She struggled for a minute but Princess ran to her aid and she was forced to hold the dog off Murdoch. Canning was retching and gasping on the floor. Murdoch left Ettie, dragged out his handcuffs and snapped them around the fallen man's wrists.

The crimson satin cloth had got wrapped around Canning's legs, and his own blood was making ribbons on the floor.

Epilogue

SUNDAY, MARCH 17

EVEN AFTER A MONTH , the parlour still reeked of kerosene. When Murdoch had finally limped home, a shocked Beatrice Kitchen had soaked pieces of flannel in kerosene oil and applied them to the multitude of bruises on his arms and legs. The dog bite she had bathed in a solution of carbolic acid, and the initial pain was worth it because no infection had developed. Canning had not been so fortunate.

The Kitchens and Murdoch were sitting in the parlour after Sunday Mass. Arthur had accompanied them to St. Paul's for the first time in almost a year. The egg-seller's cure seemed to be working and although he now looked exhausted his strength was generally much improved. Without complaint he downed his twelve eggs and cream a day.

Beatrice poured Murdoch some more tea. He could see she was dying to tell him something but with the instincts of the born storyteller she was saving the news until the right moment.

What's on your mind, Mrs. K.?" he asked her finally. She put down her teacup, her eyes bright with excitement.

"I have been wanting to chat about my little encounter yesterday but there simply has been no opportunity. You were out."

Murdoch had attended his second salon dance the night before with Professor Otranto's students. It had not been at all satisfying. He had practically destroyed the velvet dancing slipper of one of his partners and she had been most displeased.

"Now's your chance, then, Mother," said Arthur.

"I met the Rhodeses' new cook at the market yesterday," Beatrice continued. "Her name is Doris Winn. She's from down east, your country, Mr. Murdoch. We fell to talking, you know how it is. She was surprised I knew about the family's misfortunes. I didn't say much, of course, merely made an enquiry after Mrs. Rhodes's health."

She glanced rather anxiously at Murdoch, but he smiled reassuringly.

"I'm sure you were absolutely discreet, Mrs. K."

"For Mary's sake get on with it, Mother," said Arthur.

"Don't rush me ... Where was I? Oh, yes, Miss Winn. She told me that Mrs. Rhodes is planning to return to England in the spring and she's not certain if she will ever come back to Canada. Her son and his fiancée are going to follow as soon as Miss Shepcote is out of mourning. And Mrs. Rhodes is taking the stableboy, Joe, with her. She's made quite a pet of him, by all accounts."

"I'm glad about that," said Murdoch.

"Yes, poor mite. But here is the news. The doctor has moved out of the house! Just two weeks ago, a woman came to the door asking for him. Well, Doris had hardly got her feet wet, as it were, and she didn't know as it wasn't one of his patients, so she let her in. And then there was a dreadful scene. The woman wasn't a patient at all but said she had been living with the doctor as man and wife for over two years. Can you imagine that?"

Arthur glanced over at Murdoch. "Did you have any idea about this, Will?"

"Let's just say I'm not at all surprised. I suspected the good doctor was up to something to give him a guilty conscience."

"According to Doris Winn the woman is completely vulgar. She has a daughter but the girl isn't the doctor's. She said it was because she wanted the girl to be adopted and have a respectable home that she came forward." Beatrice sniffed.

"It sounds noble enough, but from what Doris said the woman is just out for what she can get."

"Almost makes you sorry for him," said Arthur.

"Not too sorry, Father. A man in his position keeping a mistress should be ashamed ... Anyway, let me go on. Mrs. Rhodes was home at the time and Doris said she was completely ladylike during the whole thing. Can you imagine? I wouldn't be, I can tell you that." She nodded over at her husband. "Fortunately Arthur's never given me cause. Anyways, in the end she asked the woman to leave. The doctor packed up the very next day." She lowered her voice. "Doris thinks they may even divorce. I feel the most sorry for the Shepcote girl myself. She's had enough scandal to deal with."

She paused and it was clear the real dirt was about to be dished. "Doris said she'd run into that wicked Edith Foy last week who's been saying all manner of dreadful things about the family. A case of the pot calling the kettle black, if you ask me, after what her own husband done, but there you go. Fortunately she's got her head on her shoulders, has Doris Winn, and she took it all with a pinch of salt." She stopped to savour the moment. "I'm referring to young Rhodes."

"What do you mean, Mother?"

"Mrs. Foy claims he's not quite, er, natural. There was some scandal to do with a stableboy last summer. It was all hushed up but apparently his mother found them ... together. There are whispers he associates with known - what is the word, Arthur? Miss What's-it?"

"You're thinking of Miss Mollys, I believe, Mother."

"Yes, that's it. However, the young fellow is going to marry Miss Shepcote, who by all accounts adores him. That's sure to set him to rights. After all, boys do odd things sometimes, don't they?"

Murdoch liked young Rhodes for his kindness to Joe Seaton, and he too hoped his marriage would straighten him out.

Arthur changed the subject. "How's Mr. Quinn doing?"

"Almost recovered. I dropped in to see him yesterday, as a matter of fact. He's eating solid foods now."

"No more dognapping, I hope."

"No, he's sworn off it. He knows what would happen if he tried that again. I can't ignore it next time."

"Thank the Lord for those dogs. You might have been killed and we wouldn't have liked that, would we, Mother?"

"Not at all." She made the sign of the cross over her neat bosom. "Every time I think of you and that Antichrist my blood runs cold."

"He'll hang, won't he, Will?"

"If I have anything to do with it."

"At least he's confessed to doing for Shepcote. Miss Harriet won't have to think her father committed a mortal sin," said Beatrice.

Murdoch thought privately that given everything else Shepcote had been guilty of, that might not be high on Harriet's list of problems. According to Canning, it had been Shepcote who forced opium on Therese. She had managed to run off from the Yeoman Club, where they'd taken her, but the drug and the bitter winter night had overwhelmed her.

"Such a tragedy. And what a dreadful hypocrite that man was," said Beatrice.

"Yes, indeed."

Murdoch thought of the sordid pictures he'd found in Shepcote's desk. He hadn't told the Kitchens.

Suddenly Beatrice clapped her hands together like a child.

"Mr. Murdoch, I almost forgot to tell you. We are getting a new boarder. She's a niece of Doris's. A widow with a seven-year-old boy and she desperately needs a nice lodging. I offered our place. Now that Arthur is getting better there will be no danger, I'm sure. She can have the backroom. Her name is Enid - strange name, it's Welsh, I believe. She is still a young woman, a looker, according to her aunt."

Beatrice smiled slyly at Murdoch. "She's probably been lonely without a husband. Perhaps you could interest her in dancing lessons."

"Mother," protested Arthur, "you're not trying to do a bit of matchmaking, are you? Will isn't interested in that sort of thing, are you?"

Murdoch chuckled. "I'd be glad to have a partner at my dance class. Let's hope she's got iron toes."

What he couldn't say was that he had a sudden hope that a suitable woman would obliterate the memory of a scrawny, not too clean prostitute, whose tears had wet his cheek as he held her close in his arms.

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UNDER THE DRAGON'S TAIL

A Detective Murdoch Mystery

Maureen Jennings



MCCLELLAND & STEWART

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A DETECTIVE MURDOCH MYSTERY

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Acknowledgements

To Iden,
with gratitude forever
for his love and support

*My father compounded with my mother under
the Dragon's tail and my nativity was under
Ursa
Major, so that it follows I am rough and
lecherous.*

-Shakespeare, King Lear

PROLOGUE



FEBRUARY 1887

The woman had been labouring since the previous afternoon and now her time was close. At first, she'd cried out with each wave of pain and the cold night wind snatched the cries and swept them down the hill where they dispersed in the frozen fields. Now as dawn crept closer, she only moaned, exhausted by her travail.

Dolly Merishaw, the midwife, squatted down beside the narrow bed to examine her patient.

"It's time to bear down, madam. Hold onto this and pull as hard as you can. At the same time I want you to think of making your motion into the commode and push. That's it. Push. And again."

Suddenly, there was a rush of fluid and blood from the woman's womb and she shouted, pulling desperately on the towel which was tied to the bedpost. She was swept up in waves of such primitive power that she could not possibly resist. Her anus and privates bulged, she shrieked again, certain she was about to be torn asunder.

"The baby's crowning, we're almost done," said Dolly. Her words were soothing but her thoughts were steeped in malice. "I know what's going on, my fine lady. You're hoping it will die, then nobody'll ever know. But it's going to live, all right. And I know. I know all about your sin."

CHAPTER ONE



JULY 1895

Sunshine was streaming through the kitchen window, making the flies sluggish as they crawled across the pine table. Irritably, Dolly Merishaw swatted a few of them, brushing the carcasses onto the floor. Even that slight effort caused a stabbing pain behind her eyes. She tried to wet her lips but her tongue was thick as cloth. She picked up the beer jug from the sideboard, but there were only dregs left and a bluebottle had drowned itself in the bottom.

She knew the two boys were out scavenging along the Don River and that Lily was delivering laundry to her customers on Gerrard Street, but she resented the fact they weren't here to look after her, to bring her a pot of tea the way she liked.

"Useless slags," she said out loud.

Not that she ever uttered a word of appreciation when her daughter waited on her. In Dolly's opinion, Lily had forfeited the right to thanks.

She pushed up the window sash and stuck her head out. The air was warm and soft, the sun caressing. Early July was the best time of the summer, before the August heat roasted the city like a cut of beef.

Even for Dolly, the sight of the trees dappling the street was appealing, and she leaned her arms on the windowsill for a moment. Two women bicyclists rode by, both of them sitting straight and rigid at the high handlebars. One was wearing knickerbockers and leggings, and Dolly noticed a passerby turn and glare. Many people were offended by

these new bicycling outfits, Rational Dress, as they were called, but Dolly approved. She was happy to see women upset male tempers.

She retreated back to the kitchen, wondering if she was well enough to go out. She decided she was. She fancied some calf's liver for her breakfast, and Cosgrove's, the butcher, wasn't too far. And she could go to the Dominion Brewery on Queen Street. They sold stale beer at a cheap price.

Her felt slippers loose on her feet, she shuffled off to the parlour to get dressed. Ever since they had moved to Toronto, Dolly had been essentially living in this one room, as she was usually too full to climb the stairs to her bedroom. She slept on a Turkish couch, and Lily brought her meals on a tray. It was not uncommon for Dolly to throw the food at her daughter if she was displeased and Lily screamed back, raw, wordless cries. In the kitchen the boys listened, ears pricked, wary as fox kits.

It took Dolly almost an hour to make the journey, but when she returned to the house, neither her daughter nor her foster sons had returned.

"Where is the slut?"

She poured herself some of the flat, bitter ale and took a long swallow. Her parched throat was eased at once. She put the package of meat on the table and opened it up, smoothing out the newspaper that the butcher had used to wrap the liver. Her glance was idle at first, but suddenly she paused, bent closer, and squinted at a photograph on the inside page.

"My, my, look who it isn't."

A smear of blood partly obscured the picture but the caption confirmed her. She plopped the liver on the table and carefully tore the piece out of the newspaper. She read the notice again. What luck. Good for her, but bad for the

other one. Clutching the strip of paper, she trotted off to the parlour, moving with more vigour than she had in a long time.

The room was hot and buzzed with flies feeding off the remains of last night's stew. The curtains were still closed but she didn't open them. She could see well enough and she wanted privacy. Beneath the window was her prized desk. She went over to it, pulling out a leather thong that hung around her neck. The key was never anywhere else, and it was warm and greasy from nestling between her breasts. She unlocked the desk, rolled back the top, and sat down. There wasn't much inside. A blotter, a tarnished silver inkwell and steel pen, a jar of her special herbs, the tin where she kept her money. Usually she enjoyed counting the coins and the bills, but today she shoved the tin aside and pulled open the drawer at the back of the desk. Reverently, she took out a vellum autograph album. One of her clients had left it behind years ago, and Dolly had appropriated it for use as her record book. The cover was soft and supple, royal blue with the word *Friends* embossed in gold letters. The paper was thick and creamy. She placed the piece of newspaper on the blotter, wiped her fingers on her skirt, and opened the album.

It didn't take her long to find the entry she wanted. In the eight years that had passed since then, her business had lessened considerably, and over the last three years there were no birth entries at all. Carefully, she tore out one of the unused pages and placed it on the blotter. She picked up the pen. The nib was crusty with dried ink but usable, and the inkwell hadn't dried out. She stroked, "Dear—" Bugger! There was a blob of ink on the paper. Perhaps she'd better practise first.

"I'm sure you remember the occasion of our first meeting."

The only way a person would forget that was if they was dead and she knew that wasn't the case.

"I have had some family troubles which has forced me into changing my name for reasons of privacy as I am sure you of all people can understand."

Even writing that down made Dolly flush with anger. She'd been ruined through no fault of her own.

"I did as good by you as I could. Times are hard, my business has fallen off. A small gratuity would be kindly received. Or else..."

Or else what? She could go to the newspapers she supposed, but she had the uneasy suspicion the owner would throw her out on her arse in short order. No, a word in the right places was better. Or rather, the *threat* of a word in certain ears. Dolly studied her note. That would do. She tore out another blank page and started to copy what she had written.

Lily lifted her face towards the puff of cool, evening breeze that came through the open window. She had almost finished her ironing, and her wrist and forearm were aching. The smooth, fresh linens were piled on the chair beside her. Dolly was sitting in the reed rocker by the window. She had consumed two large jugs of hard beer by now, and she was full. She had the album in her lap, but her brief good humour of the afternoon had vanished. As she rocked herself back and forth, she was muttering under her breath. "Stupid cow, they was all the same. Listened to some glib-glab from any man who wanted to stop his beak. Then when they had a natural in the oven they wanted Dolly to help. And she did. She was the best. But she was brought down. No fault of hers."

Lily, who was stone deaf, eyed her mother nervously, reading the signs the way a wild creature does and knows from the wind and the smell in the air that a storm is coming. The two boys were at the table. The younger boy, Freddie, had found a little lead horse in the mud of the river

and he'd harnessed it to an empty matchbox. He was trotting it around the table, over the hedge of the plates, through the stream of the sticky spilled beer. George, bored and restless, was watching him. Then suddenly, he winked and reached in the basket for one of Lily's clothes pegs. He held it upright in front of the horse and carriage and motioned Freddie to give him the toy. With one savage rush, he smashed the peg flat and made the horse trample over it.

Freddie glanced over to Dolly in alarm, afraid she would see. He knew without ever saying so that George was exacting retribution on their foster mother.

"Pray for us now and in the hour of our death, Amen."

William Murdoch had said four Hail Marys and the Lord's Prayer three times, once in Latin. This was not because he was especially pious—he wasn't anymore—but because he had insomnia and repeating the familiar words sometimes lulled him to sleep. Not tonight. It was like trying to catch a fish with your bare hands. The worst thing was that tomorrow he had to get up at half past five to do his training ride. However, he'd heard the church on Queen Street toll out ten o'clock, then eleven, and shortly it would be dolefully chiming out midnight. Maybe he should reset his alarm clock and get an extra hour. He flung himself onto his back. Better not. The police athletic tournament was only four weeks away and he had to train hard if he was going to outride Varley, the new crack from number-three station. And beat the shicey bastard he would, or die in the attempt.

Bong, bong, bong.

Twelve midnight. He thought the bell ringer was hurrying it, keen to get to his bed probably. Where he would no doubt immediately fall into a blameless sleep.

From the parlour below Murdoch heard Arthur Kitchen, his landlord, coughing his perpetual, spongy cough.

His own body tightened up in empathy with the sick man. In spite of Beatrice Kitchen's best efforts the consumption was continuing its inexorable march, and Murdoch was afraid Arthur mightn't last out the year. All of a sudden his bed felt lumpy, and he turned over again trying to find a comfortable spot. Trying to get away from his thoughts. This next Christmas would be the second one without Elizabeth. If she had lived they might have had a child by now, the start of the family he yearned for. However, typhoid was no respecter of dreams and had ignored the desperate novenas he made when she fell ill, the masses he bought. "God took her to his bosom. He needed her more than you did," said the priest, and Murdoch, in a surge of blasphemous rage, barely held back from punching him in his prissy mouth. He, himself, was lucky to be spared, said the doctor, but he didn't feel lucky. For many months he had wanted to be dead too.

Bong, bong...

The last toll faded. He flopped his leg to the edge of the bed. He and Liza had never had conjugal relations, of course. Once when they were alone in her sitting room, hot with desire, he had touched her breast. Because of her stiff corset, the gesture was as unsatisfying as stroking the armchair. She had laughed mischievously into his eyes. "Soon, Will, soon." But hardly one month later the fever swept the house where she boarded, taking off all of them and several more who'd been in contact with the place.

Murdoch thrashed in earnest. He knew when his mind went in this direction sleep was out of the question. Shut it off, he said to himself, but he couldn't. He'd never even seen her unclothed but he imagined her lying beside him, warm and soft.

When he was a young man working at the lumber camp near Huntsville, he'd got up his courage and asked one of the older men what connection with a woman was like. The logger, who spoke tenderly of his absent wife, contemplated

his question for a moment, then said seriously, "It's a bit difficult to put into words, Will. The closest I can come is this. Imagine thrusting your member into warm mash, at the same time as you jump out of a tree."

Murdoch sighed again.

Annie Brogan pulled her garters over her silk stockings and shook out her skirt. She was wearing her stage clothes, a stiff taffeta dress of bold red stripes with an uncomfortably tight bodice cut low. She thrust her sore feet into her boots, wet the tip of her finger, and rubbed at the scuff marks on the toe. Part of her act was to dance with men from the audience, and some squab was always treading on her. She yawned and stared down at the man on the bed. He was naked, his now flaccid John Thomas draped limply on his fat leg. He snored and the thick nose-sound sickened her. In daylight with his nobby clothes on, she liked him well enough. He was generous. But always when he was like this, replete with his long-drawn-out screw, she felt such revulsion her own thoughts frightened her.

She yawned again, uncontrollably. She would have liked to sleep the night in that comfortable, clean bed but she knew Richard wouldn't want that. He preferred her to come and go unseen. The Yeoman Club where they had their rendezvous was convenient for that reason. Situated on River Street, it was a favourite place of well-to-do men who wanted luxury and discretion rather than a fashionable address.

The wick in the oil lamp was low, but she could see the money he'd left on the bedside table. She picked up the bills and tucked them into her finger purse. He always said it was for cab fare and she maintained the pretence. To think more deeply was unbearable. As she finished dressing, the brass clock on the mantel chimed the quarter hour. She almost

giggled. Poor little Cinders, leaving the prince before her clothes turned to rags again.

This was a plainly furnished room, too sober for her taste, but she knew the members who used it weren't particular about the appearance as long as it cost dear. There was a pull-down bed, comfortable brown suede chairs, a fine glass cabinet filled with books, rarely opened. But best of all, the room had access to a private laneway.

She pulled aside the green felt curtain that masked the outside door. For a moment, she hesitated. She was not looking forward to what she had to do. Truth was she would have given anything not to go there. Not to see the woman again.

The night air was sweet-smelling, cool on her face. She closed the door softly behind her and stepped into the welcoming darkness.

CHAPTER TWO



Murdoch anticipated the bawling of the alarm by a fraction of a second and sat up immediately to switch off the bell. He peered blearily at the clock, then dropped back to his pillow to catch one more sip of shut-eye. As he lay, he heard a faint squeak of bedsprings from the adjoining room. The walls were thin and he hoped he hadn't disturbed Enid, his fellow lodger. He held his breath, listening, but there was no further sound. Sometimes he heard her whimpering in her sleep, making him ache to go and comfort her, but this morning both she and her boy were quiet.

He sat up, swung his legs out of the bed, and pulled off his nightshirt. He was ashamed at how persistently and vividly his imagination conjured up an image of the young widow sleeping curled up in her bed. He felt disloyal to Liza's memory.

He dressed hurriedly. His black woollen bicycle sweater was getting quite rank with sweat, but it would have to do until washday. Boots in hand, he tiptoed down the landing, using the light from his bicycle lamp to guide him. The house was silent, even Arthur seemed to have gained some peace. Before he became ill, he had been a crack wheeler and over the past few weeks they'd spent enjoyable evenings planning strategies for the upcoming race. At the last tournament, Murdoch had won the mile sprint, but this year he'd wanted more challenge and he'd entered the five-mile handicap. Tired and gritty-eyed, he berated himself as a flagellating fool.

Don't think, just keep moving. It'll be a chop when you get started. At this time of day, the air of the city was fresh, the streets clean. With all the sluggards still wallowing in sleep, he could ride on the sidewalks and avoid the horse droppings and dust of the road.

He crept down the stairs to the front hall where he stowed his wheel. He'd saved for a year to buy it, sixty dollars, almost a month's wages. The light from his kerosene lamp gleamed on the polished ram's horn handlebars. The finish was a modern maroon and the double tires the best Morgan and Wright made. The bicycle was still new enough for him to experience sinful pride in the treasures of the world. A considerable amount of pride if the truth be known.

He manoeuvred carefully through the front door. Outside, the dreaming street was hazy in the grey light of dawn. Suddenly, a cat yowled. Its rival answered and they both dashed across the road in front of him. The leading cat was black and thin, the other animal, a big marmalade, looked better nourished. Murdoch watched them disappear into the shrubbery of his neighbour's front yard. The eternal conflict he thought, then grinned to himself. Liza had often chided him about finding allegories everywhere he looked.

He tugged his cap tight on his brow, mounted his wheel, and pushed off from the curb.

"Hear me, Varley, I intend to be the cock of this race."

George Tucker opened his eyes. As usual, his nightshirt was drenched in sweat. He always blamed their small, stuffy room, which retained the heat better than the Gurney did. In fact, he sweated nightly from a terror his survival depended on denying. He sniffed. There was a bad pong. Freddie had wet the bed as he always did when he was afraid. He'd moved as far to the edge as he could but George could feel the heat from his body, smell the stink of the other boy's breath. Viciously, he kicked out with his heel, connecting

with a crack on Freddie's shinbone. With a cry the boy awoke and clutched his leg.

"You pissed again," said George, and Freddie's hands flew to protect his privates, where retribution was usually exacted. He didn't say a word, knowing from long experience it would do no good and was more likely to worsen George's ire.

"Get up, you stinking darkie fice. It's late. She'll have our arses on a bandbox."

He sat up and scratched at his ankle, where a rash of new bites had come up in the night. It was impossible to eliminate the voracious bedbugs in the old house, and with the heat they flourished.

"I don't hear nobody," said Freddie.

George felt like kicking him again. He always did when the boy spoke so timidly. But he was right. Lily's bedroom was directly across from them but he couldn't hear her. When she washed herself in the morning she made strange humming noises, tuneless sounds the way an old deaf dog might still bark at silent shadows. Not that Lily was old yet. Not young either but still with firm diddies and a round arse. George was considering trying out his sugar stick on her. Although nobody celebrated, he'd claimed July the thirtieth for his birthday and he thought this might be a present to himself.

"Where's Mrs. Mother?" asked Fred, who was sitting up in bed but waiting for George to move first.

George listened. The parlour was directly beneath them and they could usually hear Dolly moaning in her sleep, shouting at a bad dream, breaking wind noisily. She was always in a bad skin when she first got up and they were careful to stay out of her way.

"D'you think Lily's gonna get it?" asked Freddie.

"'Course she is."

In spite of his scoffing tone, George felt a pang of fear. The punishments that Dolly exacted on her daughter were

fearsome to behold.

He got out of bed and went over to the slop pail to pee. Then he splashed tepid water on his face from the tin bowl on the washstand and pulled off his grubby nightshirt. Last week, Lily had washed his one shirt, a brown holland. He'd sat bare-chested until it was ready, arms hugging his bony ribs. George was ashamed of his size and yearned for the day he would grow taller and heavier. He slipped the shirt over his head. It smelled of carbolic soap and sunlight, a smell he liked. His plaid woollen trousers, however, were filthy, torn at the knee and too big. He'd acquired them last year on one of his hunts along the riverbank. Didn't matter that the owner was in swimming. George just walked away with the trousers over his arm, casually and calmly.

Underneath the clothes, his body was dirty and smelly but he didn't care. He never went to school, never associated with anybody who was clean enough to notice the difference. As long as he could remember he had lived with Dolly, although she was not his mother and never ceased to remind him of the fact. His own mother was a tart, a doxie who had kissed the devil's behind which was why he looked the way he did and why she had abandoned him to Dolly's care when he was an infant.

"If it wasn't for me you'd have ended up in a pauper's orphanage," she said, and George often thought his life might have been better if he had.

"Get a move on," he said to Fred, who was watching him with dark, nervous eyes. Their first job was to scavenge along the river, then go down to the lakeshore. They searched mostly for firewood to keep the stove going, but they could expect a cuff from Dolly if they didn't come back with something she could use or pawn. She'd actually smiled at him once when he found a woman's earbob of silver filigree buried in the sand.

He listened again but there was no sound at all from the room below. He couldn't let go of the tight knot of fear in his

stomach. They were all going to get it as soon as she woke up, not just Lily. And he knew for sure it would be bad.

CHAPTER THREE



Murdoch, thinking weighty and melancholy thoughts about the capriciousness of life, watched two flies crawl around the lip of the saucer. One succumbed to temptation and fell into a sweet, sticky death, the other flew away. Because the stables were adjacent to the police station, it was impossible to keep the fly population anywhere close to bearable. However, Mrs. Kitchen had assured him the best way to catch flies was with a mixture of egg yolk and molasses and he'd placed two full saucers on his desk. So far he'd only netted four carcasses. It was more efficient to swat them. He despatched two in quick succession, both unfortunately crawling across the portrait of Her Majesty which hung behind him and which was now pocked with tiny blood stains. The matching portrait of Chief Constable Grasett was even more defaced but that was probably because Murdoch pursued the flies on that picture with more vigour.

He stretched his arms above his head and rubbed hard on his brow to wake himself up. He would have given a day's wage for a short kip, but he knew that if Inspector Brackenreid found him asleep it would be truly costly. The problem wasn't only his sleepless night. The cubicle that passed as his office had only one small, high window that let in plenty of flies and dust but not much air or light.

Yet another yawn rippled up his throat. The morning had been quiet and the only report he'd had to do was complete. A cabbie was charged with galloping his horse along Queen Street. He said he hadn't, that the horse had got the bit

between his teeth, but two witnesses swore they'd heard him crack his whip. The case would go before the courts.

There was a tap on the wall outside the cubicle. Because the space was so small he'd done without a door and the entrance was hung with a reed curtain. He could see the outline of Constable George Crabtree looming on the other side.

"Yes?"

Crabtree pushed aside the clacking strips.

"There are two ragamuffins out front, sir, with some story about their mother being dead. They can't rouse her they say."

"Dead drunk?"

"It's possible, sir, but they do seem quite ascafed. Say she's gone stiff."

Murdoch stood up, welcoming the diversion.

Number-four police station was not the largest or busiest in the city but it maintained law and order over a diversified area. To the west and north were gracious homes on wide, tree-lined streets such as Church and Gerrard. To the east and south were run-down row houses, workmen's cottages, small businesses, and manufacturers' properties. Most of the crimes that elicited charges were for petty theft or drunk and disorderly conduct. Without exception these misdemeanours occurred in the east side.

Murdoch followed Crabtree to the main hall of the station. A high counter divided the room in half, on one side the upholders of the law, on the other their uneasy charges. Two boys were sitting close together on the wooden bench that ran around the far side of the room. They were barefoot and dirty.

"Hello, young masters, what's the problem?" Murdoch asked.

"She's dead, sir, stone dead." The older boy who spoke was scrawny, smelly, and ill-dressed. His eyes were badly crossed and this inability to meet a direct gaze made him

seem shifty. His words tumbled out. "She didn't get up in the morning, see. No sign of her. I thought she might just be feeling under the weather so I took her in some tea. There she was on the floor, stiff as a poker."

"Hold on. Who're you talking about? Who's dead?"

"Our mother, Mrs. Dolly Shaw. You'd better come see, sir."

"Where is she?"

"In the parlour. She's stiff as a board," he said again.

"Your mother, you say?"

"She's not really our mother, I mean not blood, but we've always bin with her, haven't we, Freddie?"

He nudged his companion, who nodded vigorously. This boy was a quadroon, with dusky skin and light brown curly hair, very tangled. He kept his eyes to the ground except for quick anxious glances at his companion.

"And what's your relationship to each other?"

The older one looked puzzled. "I dunno, sir. I suppose we're brothers."

Murdoch didn't think that was biologically possible given how different they looked, but he didn't comment. He took out his notebook and pencil from his pocket.

"We'll come take a look. Where do you live?"

"Over on River Street, corner of Wilton. Number one-thirty-one."

"Your names?"

"I'm George Tucker, this is Alfred Locke."

Murdoch squatted down in front of the quadroon boy.

"Cat got your tongue, Alfred?"

He shook his head, shrinking back into the bench.

Murdoch straightened up.

"Let's go and see what's up, Crabtree."

"Shall I fetch the coroner, sir?"

"Not yet. We'd better find out what's happened first. I'll ride on ahead on my wheel. You bring the boys."

“Please, sir, can we come with you? We can run real fast, can’t we, Freddie?”

Murdoch gazed at their worried faces and relented.

“All right. Come on. But I warn you I’m a scorcher.”

They both smiled a bit.

In spite of what the boy had said, Murdoch had doubts that the woman was really dead. More likely passed out from too much jackey.

Annie could hear her sister moving about in the next room and she opened her eyes reluctantly. Sleep was a warm cocoon she wanted to stay in, and as consciousness returned the memory of the previous night inched closer like a poisonous spider that had been waiting for her to move.

She sat up, squinting her eyes against the bright sun trying to squeeze around the edges of the old velvet curtains at the window. There was a band of dull pain pressing behind her eyes.

“Mildred? Millie? What are you doing?”

Her sister answered from the kitchen. “I’m making tea.”

“Good. I could do with that.”

“There isn’t enough for two.”

Selfish tit, thought Annie.

“I don’t mind if it’s weak. Add more water.”

Tentatively she swung her legs out of bed and waited, testing the level of pain in her head. A whet would be far better than a spot of cat-pee tea but there wasn’t any. She had finished the bottle last night when she got home. She’d sat in the dark kitchen while Millie snored softly in the bed. She would have drunk herself into oblivion if there’d been enough gin but there wasn’t.

Moving slowly, she pulled the chamber out from under the bed and squatted. Millie came in carrying a tin tray. She didn’t look at Annie but plunked the tray on top of the

washstand, pushing aside her sister's stays, which were draped there.

"Tea's finished, so's the bread."

"Can't you—"

"No. There's no more tick."

Her face was sullen and Annie could feel her own anger rising. Ungrateful bint. She got up from the pot and Millie handed her one of the cracked cups, took the other, and sat on the one chair by the bed. Annie inspected her cup, half-filled with insipid tea, held it in both hands, and took a cautious sip.

"Ugh, what'd you do, wave a tea leaf at it?"

"Don't drink it if you don't like it."

"What's up with you?"

"It'd be nice for once to have a bit of money. You took all of it."

"Sod it, Millie, I had to pay for the medicine, didn't I?"

"What medicine?"

"What medicine? My ear lugs must be plugged up."

She put down her cup, and opened the drawer of the washstand.

"Here." She thrust a brown paper bag at Millie.

Reluctantly Millie opened it.

"What is it?"

"Those are special herbs."

"Where from?"

"A woman of my acquaintance."

"How d'you know they'll work?"

"They will, believe me."

For the first time, Millie looked directly at her sister, caught by her tone.

Annie shrugged. "Never mind that now. Come on. No sense in dawdling. You have to stew the whole lot in boiling water for half an hour, then you drink two cups every two hours until—well, until it works."

Millie put the bag on the washstand and averted her head.

"I'm not going to do it."

"What do you mean, 'I'm not going to do it.' Do we have a choice, my lady?"

Her sister began to weep, sniffy infuriating cries.

"I want to keep the baby."

"Then what? You've already bin warned. One more day off and you'll get canned."

"I was sick. I couldn't help it."

"And when the kid's sick and can't help it, do you think the boss'll understand? Bloody hell, Millie, you're a nickel girl, if that. They won't hold no job for you. And don't think you can count on me to watch the squawler."

"Don't worry, I wouldn't consider it."

"What then?"

Millie swallowed hard.

"I could put it up for adoption. There are lots of decent people who haven't been able to have a baby of their own. Rich people."

Annie slapped her hard across the face and Millie screamed out.

"What's that for?"

"To wake you up, you stupid tart. It's easy to say that now when the thing is just gas in your stomach. Wait until it grows and moves and then comes out, a sodding flesh-and-blood baby. See if you want to let it go then. You might as well try to cut off your arm or your leg and give that away."

"Annie!"

"I never thought you'd be this stupid, Millie." She grabbed up the brown bag. "Here. Go and make the brew. I'll stay with you while you go through it even if I have to cut work."

Millie was sobbing in earnest. "I can't...it's him inside me, Annie. I'm carrying John. I can't get rid of his baby."

Annie grabbed her sister by the arms, and started to shake her.

"You nocky bint. Do you think he cared a piss where he dipped his beak? Do you? Answer me. I want an answer, you mardy tit. Do you think he cared which doodle sack he put it in? Carrying John my arse. He's bunked off, hasn't he? Like they all do."

Mildred's hair was coming loose with the violence of the shaking, and although she didn't fight back she was shocked into some semblance of backbone.

"He might be ill. That might be why he hasn't come to church. You don't know, Annie. You think you know everything but you don't."

Annie let her go in disgust.

"I know he's like any other flash man, lots of glib-glab, pushing to have a bit, and before you know there's a bun in the basket and no husband to be seen."

"He loves me, Annie, I know he does."

"Good. Good. If that's the case he'll marry you, won't he?"

Millie shook her head. "I told you it's not possible. He'll lose his job. His employer is very strict."

"You're a little liar, Millie Brogan. That's not the only reason. He can get another job. What is it? Is the sly arse married already?"

"No!"

"What then?"

"I can't say, you'll think the worst."

Annie raised her hand. "Tell me!"

"He's betrothed."

Annie snorted. "Ha. Well that's one engagement that's meant to be broken." She pulled off her nightgown and reached for her stays. "Come on."

"Where?"

"We're going to have a chat with John-what's the sod's name again?"

"Meredith."

"Merry Dick?"

"Annie!"

"Where does Mr. Merry Dick live?"

"Annie, we can't go there."

"We can and we will."

Millie lowered her head stubbornly but Annie yanked her hard by the hair, forcing her to look up.

"Would you rather I have a whisper in Reverend Jeffery's hairy ear? What would your good friends think about that?"

Her sister flinched, then said, "He's in service but I'm not sure where—a big house on Jarvis Street. He showed me once after church."

"Too bad it wasn't the only thing he showed you."

She let her go, then picked up the corset.

"Here, help me with this."

She held her breath while her sister laced her up.

"Give me my hairbrush."

Millie opened the drawer of the washstand and scrabbled through the jammed contents.

"It isn't here."

She started to look in the cupboard below, but Annie called out.

"Stop! It's not in there."

However, Millie saw the album that was stuffed at the back of the washstand. It was a deep blue colour with gilt letters that spelled *Friends*. Before Annie could prevent her she took it out.

"What's this?"

Annie snatched it away.

"Never mind. It's mine."

"Where did you get it?"

"I said never mind." She thrust it under her pillow. "Now come on. Find that brush else I'll do something to make you hurry."

Millie swallowed a sob. "Sometimes I think you hate me."

Once again, Annie caught her sister by the arms and gave her a shake but this time she was softer. "Silly bint. Of course I don't. I'm your sister, aren't I? Haven't I always looked out for you?" She gave her a kiss on the mouth. "Get yourself fixed up, little Sissie, we're going to pay a call on Mr. John Merry Dick."

With the two boys running beside him as fast as they could, Murdoch pedalled along Wilton towards River Street, which was only three blocks away. At the corner a small crowd of the curious had already gathered. George pointed to the house on the northwest corner, a dilapidated dwelling badly in need of paint.

"That's us," he panted. The short run had left both boys gasping.

Murdoch dismounted and, blowing his claghorn, pushed his bicycle through the edge of the crowd.

"Police! Make way! Come on, let me through."

The onlookers parted willingly, calling out to him.

"What's up, mister, what's happening?"

Eager faces gaped at him. It seemed he wasn't the only one whose morning had been dull.

"I'll be sworn if you want, sir," cried out one of the men.

Murdoch nodded in acknowledgement and opened the rusty gate in the iron railing that ran around the house. George and Freddie were close on his heels and he beckoned to the older boy.

"Hold my wheel. Don't let anybody touch it on pain of death."

"Yes, sir," said George and he looked proud. Freddie stayed right beside him.

A woman was sitting on the steps, her face buried in her apron. She was rocking back and forth, making strange

keening sounds. A thin, grey-haired man was standing beside her, his hand on her shoulder.

"That's our Lily," called George. "She's the missus's daughter. She's a dummy."

Murdoch walked closer and the grey-haired man greeted him with relief.

"I'm Clarence Daly, a neighbour." He waved vaguely in the direction of one of the houses. "Lily here just clapped eyes on her mother." He patted her shoulder, kindly. "She don't hear nothing or talk much so I can't explain to her."

"I'm Acting Detective Murdoch. Where's the woman in question?"

"I'll show you," said Daly.

At that moment the crowd stirred again as Constable Crabtree, slightly red and sweaty from his fast jog to the scene, pushed his way to the gate. Murdoch was wearing his everyday clothes, fedora, brown tweed jacket and trousers. The woman on the steps had hardly seemed to pay him any attention. Crabtree, however, was in his navy-blue police uniform. He was a formidable man, easily six foot three, and his high rounded helmet added another good eight inches. The woman looked up and saw him come through the gate. She gave a high-pitched cry, an almost doglike yelp, and scrambled to her feet. Before anyone could divine her intention, she jumped down from the steps and bolted along the side of the house. Immediately, Murdoch leaped after her and caught her as she tried to climb over the fence. He managed to grab hold of her arm but she screamed such a dreadful cry that he momentarily loosened his grip. She wrenched herself free and shoved him violently away. Off balance, he fell backwards on the ground, sprawling awkwardly. The woman half rolled, half vaulted over the low railing and ran off at full speed, disappearing almost at once into a laneway. A couple of boys started off in pursuit, but their mother yelled to them and they stopped like hungry hounds thwarted in the chase. The onlookers all stirred

excitedly but nobody else followed the woman. Crabtree came over to Murdoch, who was scrambling to his feet, a touch embarrassed by his ungraceful fall.

“Shall I go after her?” the constable asked.

“Not now,” said Murdoch, brushing dust from his trousers. “Let’s go inside.”

Daly hovered at the top of the steps.

“She’s a high-strung girl that one,” he said to Murdoch, like a host apologizing for a misbehaving child. He ushered them into the hallway. Uncarpeted stairs were directly ahead. To the left was a door hung with ornate burgundy portieres.

“In there,” said Daly.

Murdoch pushed aside the curtains and entered the parlour. The room was small, hot, and dark. The stench was overpowering and there was the heavy drone of sated flies. He waited a moment to let his eyes get accustomed to the gloom. The body of a woman was lying on her back close to the hearth, her head resting on the brass fender.

He turned to the man hovering behind him in the doorway.

“Mr. Daly, I’d thank you to stand outside for the moment.”

“Right, sir.” He happily obeyed.

Murdoch went over to fireplace, negotiating his way through the furniture that crammed the room. It was obvious the woman had been dead for several hours. Flies were crawling over her face, in her eyes and open mouth. Her skin was grey. Gently, he tried to move the chin. It was stiff, the rigor of death firmly established. He called to the constable, who had stayed in the hall.

“Crabtree, come in here, would you?”

The constable entered, grimacing as the odour hit his nose. Death had loosened the woman’s bowels.

“Help me turn her.”

Together they rolled the rigid body on its side. The post mortem staining in both of her hands and fingers was clearly visible. Black felt slippers were half-on, half-off her feet and in the bare heels was the same purple coloration. She had died in the position they found her. She was wearing a grey flannel dressing robe and an old-fashioned white mobcap. A few strands of hair of an unnatural auburn tint had escaped and dragged about her face, looking like rivulets of bloody tears.

“Hold her up for a minute, will you, Crabtree?”

Near the base of the skull, the cap was marked with a rust-coloured stain. Gingerly, Murdoch lifted up the edge. The hair was matted underneath with what he assumed was blood.

“Hard bash to the noggin by the look of it.”

Crabtree grunted. “Seems that way, sir.”

Murdoch looked at him. “Don’t tell me you’re having trouble with this bit of weight? You’re our Samson.”

“It’s not the weight, sir, it’s the smell.”

“Put her back then.”

Crabtree started to lower the body to the ground but as he did so, Murdoch felt something in the right pocket of the woman’s robe.

“Wait a minute.”

He pulled out a plain envelope, unmarked and unsealed. He opened the flap and looked inside. He whistled. Stuffed in the envelope were several banknotes. Ten fifty-dollar bills to be exact.

“That’s a nice bit of dosh. Wonder where she got it?”

“From the look of her, sir, that money would have to be a lifetime’s earnings.”

Murdoch tucked the money into his inner pocket out of harm’s way. He’d find out who had the right to it later.

“All right to put her down now, sir?”

“Fine.”

“Can I open the windows?”

“Break them if you have to before we choke.”

Murdoch gazed down at the corpse, to which the flies had returned. The front placket of the nightgown was splotted with brownish stains and similar smudges were on her chin and neck. Even with all the other odours it was easy to detect the smell of beer. There was an overturned jug close beside her on the left. He picked it up and sniffed at the dregs, then he sat back on his heels and looked around. The parlour was the same size as his sitting room but contained easily twice as much furniture. The mantelpiece in front of him was black mahogany and draped with a purple satin cloth. The fender, the unwitting perpetrator of her death, was solid brass. No fire had been laid. The coating of dust was like a second skin on every surface. An oaken sideboard was against the far wall, and taking up most of the space beneath the window where Crabtree was currently breathing in fresh air was a massive rolltop desk of burl walnut. Very nobby. To the right of the door was a Turkish couch of crimson velour, partly covered with a sateen comforter. A pillow lay on the floor. He assumed this room had served as Mrs. Shaw's bedchamber. And dining room by the look of it. Dotted about the room were several used plates and dishes. One such was sitting on a nearby Morris chair and it was caked with a lemony residue that the flies were enjoying. Looked like pudding.

“Shall I send somebody for the coroner now, sir?”

“Yes, we'd better do that before she corrupts on the spot. Make sure none of those men come in until they're sworn.”

The constable wrinkled his nose.

“Disgusting piece, isn't she?”

Murdoch had to agree. One can't really help loose jowls or bad teeth if she hadn't the money to fix them. Nevertheless when Crabtree had left, Murdoch made the sign of the cross over the body and said a brief prayer for the woman's immortal soul.

By two o'clock, thirteen men had been sworn for the coroner's jury and they were jammed into the tiny room. Their first job was to view the body and even with the door and windows open, the heat and smell were overpowering. Arthur Johnson was the coroner and he was showing signs of impatience. Legally the jury had to be made up of a minimum of "twelve just men and true," but as they received no remuneration most men were reluctant to serve. It meant that if they were working they would lose pay. On his first sortie into the neighbourhood Crabtree hadn't been able to find more than ten willing to be sworn. Finally he peremptorily grabbed two passersby, two brothers who happened to be walking down River Street on their way to the market. They weren't pleased but they had no choice.

"Pay attention now," said Johnson. "The sooner I get done, the sooner you can all breathe fresh air again. I'm going to point out some things to you."

The men, who had been grumbling among themselves, quieted down. Murdoch had positioned himself slightly behind the coroner's back so he could see properly. It was apparent the man next to him had recently been tucking into a meal of boiled beef and cabbage. With onions on the side. Murdoch turned around. He could see the top of Crabtree's helmet by the door. He hoped the man was all right. He still looked rather nauseous. Not that Murdoch blamed him. He, himself, was trying to breathe as shallowly as he could.

"Right now, listen carefully." The coroner bent over the corpse, pointing for emphasis as he talked. "The woman has been dead several hours. The rigidity of death which we call rigor mortis has set in completely. Notice that purple-coloured marking on her hands and feet. There, look! if you can't see move forward. You ones in front, crouch down so the others can see."

Three or four men did so.

One of the men muttered something about this being closer than he ever got to his old lady, but the responding titters were quickly squashed by Johnson's frown.

"The staining is termed lividity. It's where it should be. The blood settles in the lowest extremities and this tells us she hasn't been shifted from the position where she died. I can't turn the head, she's still too stiff. That'll start releasing fairly soon." He grinned at the men. "It's after that the fun and games begin. The skin'll turn black, maggots are everywhere, and before long not even her own child would know her."

The jurors with the more vivid imaginations shifted uneasily.

"If we roll her on her side, like so, you can see some blood on the back of her cap." He waited while they peered at the mark. "She stinks of ale. There are stains on her robe and there was a jug right next to her. I've put it on that table. There were beer dregs in it. As you can see she's lying on top of the fender. There's a tiny mark of blood there. No, it's all right, you don't have to all move. You can take my word for it. There are no obvious signs of violence on the body, the room is not disturbed. It's a disgusting mess but that's not the same thing."

Some of the men laughed, glad to relieve the tension.

"I assume therefore that the woman got herself pie-eyed, fell, and connected her head with the fender in a manner so as to crack her skull."

"Is that what killed her, sir?" asked Clarence Daly, who was one of those subpoenaed as a juror.

"That's what I'm suggesting, isn't it? Any better ideas?"

The men variously shook their heads. More than one of them had had the experience of falling down drunk.

"We'll know for sure after the post mortem examination," Johnson continued. "Now who is she? One of you must know her, surely."

"I do," said another man.

"And who are you? Speak up so the constable can write it down."

"My name's Dick Meadows. I live down the street a piece. Her name was Dolly Shaw."

"Do you know her to be a heavy drinker?" asked Johnson.

"Worse than any judge if you ask me, sir."

There was a chuckle at his little joke, but the coroner glared. "I don't want to hear any impertinence from you men. This is a serious matter."

"Sorry, sir." Meadows tugged at the brim of his hat in deference.

"Detective Murdoch here has found some money on the woman's person. Anybody know anything about that? What did she do for a living? Daly, do you know?"

"I don't think she did anything, sir," answered Daly.

"Leastwise not that I saw. She has a grown daughter and she takes in washing. There are two nippers live with her but they're too young to bring in much."

An older man with a long unkempt beard spoke up. "I've lived on this street for ten years, sir. Dolly Shaw came here three years ago. There's never been a whisper that she had muck. She was always begging and borrowing from the neighbours as I heard."

There was a murmur of assent.

Johnson shrugged. "She most likely didn't want it known she had any savings. Why you people don't put money in the banks where it belongs, I'll never understand. Any questions so far?"

There weren't.

"I'll fix the inquest for Monday morning at ten o'clock. We might as well hold it at Humphrey's. That's the undertaker on Yonge Street for those of you who don't know. Just north of Wilton Street on the west side. The doctors usually like to do the post mortem examination there."

“Excuse me, sir.” A broad-shouldered man with a wide, red-veined face put up his hand. “I’m on the night shift at the Dominion Brewery. I have to get my kip in or I’m a goner.”

Johnson called over to Crabtree.

“Constable, how many jurors did you say we have?”

“Thirteen, sir.”

“All right then, you’re lucky, young fellow. Seeing as we’re only required to have twelve you’re excused. Everybody else, I will see you at ten o’clock. Sharp, do you hear! We’ll have the doctor’s report by then and anything else Detective Murdoch digs up.”

The men began to shuffle out, a burst of chatter released among them. One of them accidentally trod on a plate that was on the floor. Irritably, he wiped his boot clean on the carpet. Whatever the food had been, it wasn’t identifiable. Maybe mashed potatoes.

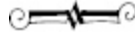
“Do you have an ambulance outside?” the coroner asked Murdoch.

“Yes, sir.”

“Take the body over to Humphrey’s. Let’s get on promptly.” He waved his hand. “This weather, the sooner we put her under the better.”

Murdoch heartily agreed.

CHAPTER FOUR



They had only enough money for two streetcar tickets, so after some wrangling they agreed to ride to the house and walk back. As Annie pointed out, they would be hot and dusty and less presentable if they walked first. Privately, she hoped they might get some money out of Meredith but she didn't say that.

The streetcar let them off at the corner of Wilton and Church and they proceeded over to Jarvis, a wide, gracious street dappled with shade from the broad-leaved hawthorn trees that overhung the sides. They didn't talk to each other, and Millie dragged a pace or two behind like a sulky child. She hated being anywhere in public with her sister. Annie was wearing her best linen suit of blue-and-white check. It was sedate enough in itself but the hemline was a few inches too high and the jacket too tight. As well, the straw hat perched on her head was bedecked with dancing blue ostrich feathers and a cascade of mauve taffeta ribbons. She was carrying a red parasol.

"I do wish you wouldn't walk like that. It isn't becoming," Millie muttered at her sister's back.

It was a foolhardy thing to say because Annie stopped immediately and turned with a ferocious glare.

"Like what? How am I walking?"

Millie winced but went on. "You're swinging your parasol as if you were...well you'd think you were leading a parade."

"I'd rather walk like that than creep along like a mouse that's expecting the cat to pounce."

The contempt in Annie's tone brought tears of humiliation to Millie's eyes. But there was an awful truth in the remark and she knew it. She was wearing her good navy serge jacket and grey skirt but the clothes were out of fashion and dowdy. Her black felt hat was trimmed only with a strip of brown silk and she carried her head bent into her hollow chest.

"Why any man would want to have a bit off with you, I don't know," added Annie. At that moment, she meant what she said. Millie's unhappiness was making her look worn and frowsy.

She set off again, swinging her parasol even more jauntily. She was actually glad for the little tiff, happy to be distracted, even momentarily, from her thoughts.

However, her mind kept returning there, the way one probes at an aching tooth. It didn't help, probably made things worse, but it was impossible to stop.

The Brogan family had not even been settled in Toronto a month when an outbreak of diphtheria snatched away both parents and two younger brothers. Annie and Millie had been taken in by a Mr. and Mrs. Reilly who were fellow emigrants. Although there were already five children in the family, the Reillys didn't hesitate. "We're poor but we'll share what we have and bring them up in the knowledge of their Faith." These proclamations were said to any who would listen and had garnered much praise and some money from the parish. In practice, it meant that the girls quickly became the household skivvies, expected to earn their keep by doing as many menial chores as Mrs. Reilly needed. Annie was seven, Millie five.

They were given a tiny room at the rear of the house which they shared with the two youngest girls. It was little more than a lean-to and in the winter it was freezing. They all suffered from colds and painful chilblains. Annie could have endured the discomfort, the hard work, but there was worse. Their room was off the kitchen where the two older

boys slept. No matter how she schemed to get to bed ahead of them, one or the other, Thomas or Patrick, was usually lying in wait.

“Millie, you can go. You stink anyway. But you, pretty Miss Brogan, you we’ll keep.”

Annie took a deep breath, feeling the bite of her stays into her ribs.

“Annie! Annie, wait up, this is the house.”

She stopped. Millie was pointing to a yellow brick house with dark green gables that sat back from the road in a well-tended garden.

“What’s the matter?” she asked. “You look like a goose just walked over your grave.”

“Never mind, just memories. They’ll do you in every time. Let’s get on with it.”

Annie caught her by the arm and pushed open the gate. The wrought-iron fence was high and elegant, enclosing various tidy shrubs. All in their proper place.

Together, the two sisters went up the paved path to the front door.

“Nobby,” said Annie, indicating the glass panel. It was an ornate flower design in red and green.

“Somebody’s been working on this,” said Annie, and she tugged at the gleaming brass bellpull with vigour.

The door opened and a young footman in grey livery stood in front of them. His polite demeanour vanished immediately.

“Millie! What are you doing here?”

“We’ve come to have a chat,” Annie answered for her. He stepped forward, half closing the door.

“Not here. You’ll get me sacked.”

“Where then?”

“Go around to the back, there by that path. I’ll run and let you into the kitchen. But I can’t stay more than a minute—”

"That'll probably be half a second longer than it took to put the kid in the basket."

He turned a shade of white-green.

"Oh God! No!"

"Oh God, yes."

Millie suddenly burst into tears, her nose and eyes running all at once. Annie almost felt sorry for Meredith, he was so terrified. He glanced agonizedly over his shoulder.

"I daren't talk to you anymore. Burns is a devil."

At that moment, they heard a child's voice, and a young girl about seven or eight years old appeared behind him.

"Excuse me, Meredith, we're going out."

He had to step aside and she came onto the top step.

"I beg your pardon, I didn't know we had visitors." Her manners were exquisite.

"Er, these are my, er, cousins, Miss Sarah, from the country."

"How do you do? We're going on the open-air streetcar to the lakeshore," she said, needing to tell somebody in her excitement. She turned as a woman came to the door, dressed for an outing. "Here are Meredith's cousins, Auntie. They're from the country."

The woman was of middle age, elegantly dressed, and would have been considered handsome except for her disfigurement. A wine-coloured naevus covered her right cheek, pulling up her lip so she seemed to be caught in a perpetual sneer.

At the sight of the two young women, she halted in the doorway. Her shock was palpable. Her hand flew to her face.

Meredith mistook her reaction for disapproval.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Pedlow, they won't stay--"

She stared at him blankly. "I beg your pardon?"

Annie jumped in. "Don't worry about us, madam. We've just come for a quick visit."

The older woman suddenly pulled down her veil and started to button her gloves.

"That's quite all right, Miss, er?"

"Brogan. Annie. You might have heard of me. I'm on the stage. I sing."

Millie gave a little moan of mortification. She hadn't told John about her sister's livelihood.

Annie gestured in her direction. "This is my sister, Mildred Brogan."

"And you're related to Meredith."

"In a manner of speaking."

The footman was moving as if he had livestock in his breeches, and Millie was trying to bury herself in her handkerchief.

"May I go ahead?" Sarah called.

Both Mrs. Pedlow and Annie suddenly focused their attention on the little girl.

"Your daughter is so like you, if I may say, madam," said Annie.

"I'm told there is a likeness, but Sarah is actually my first cousin once removed. Her mother died in childbirth in England. The father had passed away earlier and as there was nobody else, my husband and I became her guardians. She is my ward."

Annie's gaze didn't waver. "How good of you to do that for an orphan."

"She has brought great joy to my life, so it has been no hardship."

Sarah hovered at the gate afraid to go further.

"Auntie, may I go on?"

Suddenly Annie said, "Children love the theatre, don't they? I am acquainted with the manager at the opera house. Would you like me to take her down there? He would show us around."

Millie stared in horror at her sister then buried her face once more in her sodden handkerchief. Meredith gaped.

Mrs. Pedlow fidgeted with the veil on her hat. "Thank you, Miss Brogan. That is very kind." Her voice was tight.

"Perhaps we could, er, talk about it first. I wonder could you call...?"

"Love to. Would tomorrow afternoon suit you?"

"Perfectly. Shall we say three o'clock?"

"Done."

Annie actually thrust out her hand as if they were two men sealing a contract. Awkwardly, Mrs. Pedlow touched the young woman's fingers. Kid glove meeting kid glove.

"Now if you will excuse me, Sarah is longing for her ride." She paused. "Meredith, please give your cousins some refreshment. It is a warm day."

"Yes, ma'am. Thank you."

Mrs. Pedlow walked away down the path, her back straight and stiff. Her silk walking suit was a lilac tint with deep flounces of airy cream lace at the throat and sleeves, the hat a huge masterpiece of lilac ribbon, flowers, and lace. The outfit would have paid the sisters' rent for several months.

"Annie, how could you be so bold?" Millie whined at her.

"Oh, Millie, shut your trap. You don't know anything. Nothing at all."

CHAPTER FIVE



Since their new lodger had arrived, Mrs. Kitchen had set up the front parlour for meals. It meant she had to bring Arthur out into the back room but she insisted. At first, Murdoch missed the coziness of the kitchen where he'd eaten before, but he now had the chance to sit down with Mrs. Jones and her son, Alwyn, and he liked that a lot.

There was a soft tap on the door and Mrs. Kitchen came in with a tray.

"I made you a semolina pudding for your sweet."

Murdoch patted his stomach. "How am I going to compete in the games if you keep feeding me like this? I'll be having to enter the fat man's race if I carry on."

She smiled, pleased. "Nonsense. A man needs his strength." She put the tray on the sideboard. "How was the fish?"

"Delicious."

Friday was a meatless day and they'd had boiled turbot for dinner.

She placed the dish of yellow pudding in front of him and stood to watch him take his first spoonful.

"Hmm, wonderful," he said, lying blatantly.

Truth was he could have lived happily the rest of his life without ever tasting semolina again, but he wouldn't hurt her feelings by saying so.

"The boy polished his off in no time. His mother eats like a bird though. Needs some meat on her bones."

Murdoch thought the young widow's flesh was perfect for her small stature, but again he just concentrated on

getting down his sweet and made an agreeing noise.

"After you've finished, why don't you come sit out front with us. Arthur's fever has gone up so a bit of night air might do him good."

"Thank you, Mrs. K., I'd like that."

She started to gather up his dishes and said artlessly, "Would you mind to run up and ask Mrs. Jones if she'd like to join us? These days the upstairs can get to be an oven. And her working away 'til all hours. It's pleasant outside right now."

"All right."

Ever since Enid Jones had arrived, Beatrice vacillated in her opinion of the young woman. Personally, she liked her a great deal. She was sober and industrious, kept her own room spotlessly neat, took good care of her son. However, every Sunday Beatrice was forced to admit that Mrs. Jones was a Protestant. When Mrs. Kitchen set off with her rosary grasped in her hands, telling her beads on the way to St. Paul's, Mrs. Jones and her son would head in the opposite direction towards the big Baptist church on Jarvis Street. She carried a plain black Bible. On those days, Beatrice gave up the notion of matchmaking for William. During the week, however, the idea had a way of creeping back in.

Murdoch knew perfectly what his landlady was up to, but as he had the same feelings himself, voicing an objection seemed hypocritical. He pushed back his chair and wiped his moustache clean of any pudding that might be sticking there.

"I'll go this minute."

He put on his jacket, which he'd placed on the back of the chair, and blessed with Mrs. K.'s smile of approval he went in search of the widow Jones.

There were three rooms upstairs. He rented one as a bedroom and one as a small sitting room. It was a tight squeeze on his wages, but he liked having the extra space

and it had helped out the Kitchens. Mrs. Jones and her son shared the front room next to him at the top of the stairs.

Her door was open to allow for a cross draft from the open window. The boy was in bed and she was sitting beside him singing softly in a lilting language Murdoch presumed was Welsh. She had lit a candle, and in the yellow light she looked softer and less worried than she did normally.

Alwyn's eyes were closed. Murdoch paused at the threshold but she turned at the sound of his step. She put a finger to her lips, gave the child a gentle kiss on the forehead, and blew out the candle.

"Nois da."

As she came out to the hall, she realized she'd undone the top buttons of her collar and she started to fasten them quickly.

Mrs. Jones worked at home. She had a typewriting machine and spent long hours at it, mostly copying lawyer's reports and insurance claims. When she was working, she wore round steel-rimmed glasses. They had left a red mark on the bridge of her nose, and Murdoch wanted to reach out and smooth the sore place away.

"Mrs. Kitchen has asked me to invite you down to the front porch for some cool air...it really is quite pleasant, er, have you been inside all day?"

"Mostly."

She finished fumbling with her buttons, but she'd missed one and he could glimpse the soft, pale skin of her throat.

"You'll join us then?"

"Thank you, but I really can't. I have a long report to finish by the morning."

"Half an hour won't hurt. If I may say so, you look tired."

She still hesitated, both of them standing awkwardly in the narrow, shadowy hall.

"No, truly. I must refuse."

Her voice had a musical cadence to it that he found entrancing. He lingered for a moment, hoping she would change her mind but she made a movement to go back into her room.

“Goodnight then,” he said.

She gave him a shy smile. “*Nois da*. Goodnight.”

Murdoch went to join the Kitchens on the front porch, taking the stairs faster than was really necessary.

Dusk was settling in rapidly and the gas streetlamps were lit, drawing dozens of moths and bugs in a dance of death around the flickering lights. Many of the street’s residents were outside on their porches or steps, enjoying the summer evening. Here and there lamps glowed in the windows. Mr. Dwyer, an elderly bachelor who lived two houses up, was playing on a blow accordion and his neighbour Oakley called to him.

“Play ‘Banks of Loch Lomond,’ will you, Tom?”

He began, slightly off-key but not so bad as to irritate any but the purists.

Next door to the Kitchens was the O’Brien family. Mr. O’Brien was a sailor and away for long periods of time, returning to spawn yet another child and off again. Mrs. O’Brien, with the eldest girl of her brood of eight, was sitting outside on her side of the common porch. Beatrice had wheeled out her husband in his wicker Bath chair, and she’d hooked up a hurricane lamp so she could see to work. She earned a bit of extra money by making things for a fancy goods store on Queen Street. Tonight she was crocheting a lace tidy.

Murdoch came out and sat down on the top step. The evening was cool, the air freshened by a breeze coming up from the lake.

“Do you mind if I have a pipe, Mrs. K.?”

She shook her head and he lit up his Powhatten and took a deep draw.

“Well then, Will, what’s the other half of mankind been up to today?” asked Arthur.

Murdoch had got into the way of sharing the daily events of police life with the Kitchens, and Arthur, who was totally housebound, looked forward to these chats. It wasn’t just for Arthur’s sake that Murdoch discussed things, however, he’d come to rely on them himself.

He took another puff, wanting to choose his words carefully out of consideration for Mrs. Kitchen. “The big happening today was the discovery of a poor dead woman.” He related briefly what had transpired at the house on River Street.

“How’d she die?” asked Beatrice.

“Fell and knocked her head most likely. It seemed as if she’d been drinking.”

“We reap what we sow,” said Mrs. Kitchen unsympathetically. She wasn’t Temperance but she disliked excess of any kind.

“We’ll know better after the post mortem examination. The inquest’s on Monday.”

“Did she have any family?” asked Arthur.

“A daughter. Grown woman but deaf and dumb. Might be simple as well. She ran off like a scared rabbit when we showed up.”

Beatrice’s fingers stopped for a moment. “I know who that is. I’ve seen her when I’ve been coming up from the market. Has to be the same one. She’s a brunette, a bit on the lanky side, middle-aged?”

“Sounds like her.”

“She’s not that simple. In her heart maybe but not in her head. Got the manners of a heathen but she’s clever enough. She’ll wrangle with the farmer’s wives good as anybody. No mistaking what she means even though she don’t speak.” She continued with her crocheting. “Poor thing. I wonder what’s to become of her.” And she made the sign of the cross over her breast out of kindness.

"There are two boys living there as well," continued Murdoch. "Foster children as far as I could make out. I wanted them to go stay at the Humane Society but you'd think I was sending them to a training school for the fuss they made."

"Maybe they've already had a taste," said Arthur.

"Could be. They've grown up wild as foxes from what I can tell. Neither one can read nor write. It was the older boy who found her."

Murdoch had questioned George about the envelope in Mrs. Shaw's pocket, but he'd no explanation. According to him, they had a hard time making ends meet even though Lily worked like a donkey.

Arthur started to cough, helpless in its fierce bite. His wife and Murdoch waited until the fit subsided, pretending a calm neither one felt. Finally, Arthur lay back. He wiped away a spot of blood from his lips and dropped the piece of rag in the bucket filled with carbolic that was always beside him.

Mr. Dwyer had now moved into a slow, plaintive rendition of "Barbara Allen." Murdoch drew in more tobacco smoke and leaned back.

"Haven't heard that piece in a while. My mother used to sing it to us when I was a lad."

Sometimes, when his father was safely out of the way at sea, the four of them, his mother, sister, brother, and he, would sit around the fire mending the fishing nets. The room smelled of brine and fish and the knots were tough in the salt-stiff twine, but in those rare moments of peace he was happy. Albert played with his own piece of netting that his mother had given him, proudly mending it like the others, and his mother would teach them songs.

"My little brother always wanted a hearty sea shanty so he could shout out, 'Ho! Ho! Ho!' but me and Susanna begged for the sad ones."

He smiled at the memory.

“Mother would sing so sweetly it made us cry but we’d ask her again and again until she cried ‘Mercy!’ ‘Barbara Allen’ was one of our favourites.”

Murdoch began to sing, quietly, so as not to intrude.

*“Since my love died for me today,
I’ll die for him tomorrow...
Her name was Barbara Allen.”*

Mrs. O’Brien joined in and then Beatrice started to hum. Up and down the street the song came floating on the air. Mr. Dwyer finished the final chorus and there was a little smattering of applause from the choristers, well pleased with themselves.

CHAPTER SIX



Annie was relieved when Burns answered the door, not Meredith. In spite of her bravado, she hadn't been looking forward to another encounter. The butler gazed down at her disdainfully.

"Mrs. Pedlow is expecting me," she said and handed him her calling card, one of the new ones she had printed just the last week.

He glanced at her in surprise. "You're Miss Brogan?"

"Have been all my life unless you know something I don't."

"She is indeed expecting you."

He didn't need to finish the sentence. His expression said it all. Why somebody like you is calling on Mrs. Pedlow, I cannot imagine.

"Madam is in the gazebo. She asks you to join her there."

Annie was used to servants despising her and she'd long given up either fighting or placating. However, in spite of herself she still cared. She gave a haughty lift to her chin, sending the scarlet feathers bobbing.

"Where?"

Burns pointed. "Go across the grass and around by the porch. You'll see her."

Annie did as he said, irritated as her good boots sank into the soft earth. She lifted her skirt high above her ankles, aware that the butler was watching her.

The white gazebo was tucked into the far corner of the garden, and as soon as Annie rounded the porch, Maud saw

her and stood up. Today she was dressed in a lilac-flowered muslin gown. The sleeves were full to the elbow, and the bodice was of white satin, embroidered with jet and green sequins. Annie would have felt honoured by such a presentation except she had the suspicion Mrs. Pedlow dressed like this on every occasion.

In spite of her fine apparel, she looked haggard, and the pallor of her skin emphasized the lividity of the birthmark.

"Please sit down, Miss Brogan," she said and ushered her into the shade of the gazebo.

Annie took one of the wicker chairs. She smiled.

"You could have knocked me over with a goose feather when you came through the door. What a surprise after all these years."

Mrs. Pedlow made no acknowledgement to this remark but said coldly, "May I offer you some refreshment? Our cook does make a very pleasant lemonade."

Annie was put out by her tone. She had been prepared to be friendly, but hurt, she became snooty.

"Pleasant lemonade would be...pleasant."

The other woman stiffened but she poured the drink. Annie accepted the glass and took her time sipping. She could feel Mrs. Pedlow's tension, sensed she was waiting for something, but Annie'd be damned if she took the lead. Let her do it. With ostentatious delicacy, she replaced the glass on the wicker tea trolley.

"I think it's going to rain, don't you? Very unpleasant, I must say."

Her hostess clasped her hands tightly in her lap and not looking at Annie, she said, "Sarah will be back soon, so we can't waste time. We both know why you came here. Perhaps we could get straight to the point."

"And what point is that, ma'am?"

"Please, Miss Brogan, I really don't have much time."

"Pity that. I thought we could have a nice chat. About old times. However..." She began to unbutton her gloves.

“Given that we’re in a hurry and all that, do you mind if I ask you a quick question?”

“What is it?”

“What happened to your baby?”

George and Freddie were sitting at the kitchen table. They could have gone into the parlour but they were like song birds who have been caged too long and don’t fly to freedom even when the door is opened. Dolly never allowed them anywhere but the kitchen and their own room.

George had found a cigar butt on the street and was trying to get it to light, dropping matches recklessly on the floor.

“You’re gonna get it if she sees that,” said Freddie, and he gazed around uneasily as if Dolly was watching them. George punched him on the arm.

“Get it through your loaf, you nocky fool, she’s not going to give it out again. Ever. She’s gone to the grand silence, Fred. She’s a stiff. Worm fodder.”

This didn’t soothe the younger boy who was biting back tears. He swung his legs against the wooden chair.

“What’s going to happen to us then? And Lil? I wish she’d come back.”

“Don’t fret about the dummy. She’ll be back, she’s bunked off before.”

“And us?”

“We’ll be all right. Better than before, you’ll see.”

Freddie looked doubtful but he knew better than to argue. George puffed hard on the stinking cigar and managed to get a glow. He drew in a deep breath, coughed a bit, and sat back the way he’d seen the men do when he looked through the windows of the Yeoman Club down the road. He swung his dirty, callused feet onto the table.

Freddie waited, then he said in almost a whisper, “Do you think it was what Lil did as killed Mrs. Mother?”

“Not likely is it? You saw with your own eyes that Missus got up. She was walking around after, wasn’t she? Look!” He indicated a bruise on his forearm. “She could pinch good as ever.”

“Why’d she die then?”

“She fell. She was drinking like a soldier since the afternoon. She fell down and cracked her head.”

Freddie wriggled his buttocks on the chair. He always itched. The cigar had failed again and George gave up in disgust.

“Come on. We should get up the wooden hill.”

The other boy shifted restlessly. “We can stay up now. Nobody’ll mind. I want to wait for Lil.”

“No, we’ve got a lot to do tomorrow.”

“Like what?”

“Like we’ve got to see about a funeral.”

“How do we do that?”

“Bloody hell, I don’t know. We ask somebody.” He smiled ferociously, his eyes turning. “We’re family now, it’s up to us. I said, come on.”

Truth was that George was tired out and in need of retreating to his own lair, but had no intention of going up by himself.

He lit one of the porcelain oil lamps. Another thing they hadn’t been allowed to touch.

“Here, you carry this. I’ll bring the candle.”

In a circle of light the boys left the kitchen, Freddie leading the way. At the foot of the stairs, he halted and shrank against George.

“What if she’s going to come back?”

For answer George kicked him on the ankle. “Keep going, you silly coon, or you’ll get it from me worse than any ghost.”

But it was the lights that gave him courage and the necessity of being hard in front of Freddie.

Once in their squalid bedroom, they closed the door quickly as if they could ever shut out spirits.

"Can we leave the light burning?" asked Freddie.

George had every intention of so doing but he pretended to hesitate just to torment the younger boy.

"All right, you yellow belly. Anything to stop you bawling."

He turned down the wick of the oil lamp, leaving the candle stub lit. Instantly the room was filled with shadows. Both boys undressed hurriedly and jumped into bed.

"Can I sleep close, George?"

"Only if you don't fart or fidget."

"I won't, I promise."

"And if you piss in the bed, you'll get it but good."

"I won't." He pressed into George's bony back, his arms folded against his chest. They lay for a few moments then he said, "George, can I tell you something?"

"Better be good. You're spoiling my shut-eye."

"Somebody came here in the night."

"What d'you mean?"

"A woman came. I heard her. You were dead asleep but she was knocking like a thunder and woke me up."

"Probably Lily."

"She wouldn't knock on the front door."

George hesitated, not wishing to concede the point. "So what are you getting at, our Fred?"

"This woman. She and Mrs. Mother had a roaring good dustup."

"I didn't hear anything."

"The house could fall down and you wouldn't wake up," said Freddie, making a tentative joke. "They were yelling like a pair of teamsters, they were."

George shrugged. "So? Missus was always having a barney with somebody."

"What if the woman clobbered Mrs. Mother? Sent her off."

George grinned. "Good on her if she did."

"Should we tell the blues about it?"

"Tell the frogs? Have you lost a slate? It's nothing to do with us, is it? We were tucked up with Lethy, weren't we?"

He thumped the other boy again. "Weren't we?"

Freddie clasped at his arm, weighing one fear against another.

"There's something else."

"What? You're getting up my snout with your mithering."

"There was another person as came."

"What d'you mean?"

"I heard somebody else. A bit after."

"Must have been that same woman come back."

Freddie shook his head. "Seemed different. Mrs. Mother wasn't fummy. They went into the parlour. They was talking soft. No row, not like the first one. Mrs. Mother laughed. You know how she did."

He imitated a sort of mirthless cackle. George well knew what he meant. Such a laugh was always followed by some punishment, swift, capricious, and severe. He remembered and unconsciously touched a deep scar on his chin where Dolly's ring had once caught him.

"George?"

"What? Spit it out for Christ's sake."

"Just after that I heard a big bump. Real loud like something fell."

"You're a dolt, my lad. We know she fell. That was the sound. Her idea pot kissing the fender." He paused. "Did you hear the cove leave?"

Freddie nodded. "A bit after I heard footsteps in the hall and the front door opened."

"How much after?"

"I don't know."

George raised his hand to slap the other boy. "Do I have to knock some sense into your thick head? How much after? An hour? Two minutes?"

"Don't hit me. I'm trying to tell you, honest I am. It was soon." He struggled to express the concept of time elapsing. "Five or ten minutes perhaps."

"Was there a carriage outside?"

"Didn't hear one."

George rolled onto his back and laced his hands behind his head.

"Did you hear Missus after that?"

"Not a peep." Freddie paused, trying to find his courage. "Do you think this cove did for her?"

"'Course not. How many times do I have to repeat it?" He punched the other boy with the knuckle of his forefinger. "She fell. The copper didn't think she'd been done in, did he? We'd be sitting in the clink answering questions, wouldn't we? Like happened to Lily."

Freddie shivered. "I think we should tell them."

"Tell them what?"

"That I heard somebody."

"No." For George, deceit was as instinctive as a blink. "It's nothing to do with us," he continued. "You was probably dreaming if truth be told. You know how you are. We won't say nothing. No need. Let the bluebottles do their own work." Suddenly, he squeezed Freddie's chin in his hand. "Cheer up, you little gawdelpus. It'll be all right. Look." He slipped his hand into a hole in his pillow and fished around. "See."

He pulled out a small bundle wrapped in newspaper. Inside were several bank notes, mostly one-dollar bills. He flapped them under the other boy's nose.

"Smell good, don't they?"

"Where'd you get those?"

George explored the pillow again and removed a leather thong that had a small brass key attached to it.

"Where'd you think?"

"You pinched her money?"

“Not pinched, took back. By rights this money is ours considering all the work we’ve done for her. I just claimed our just wages.” He fanned the bank notes. “There’s almost fifty dollars. We can live like kings.”

Freddie’s dark eyes widened and George smiled.

“Now come on give us a kiss and go to sleep.”

Such unencumbered friendliness was so rare that Freddie wanted to cry. George turned onto his side, pulling the boy close against his back.

“George?”

“What now?”

“Say it really was some cove who did for Mrs. Mother, what if they come after us?”

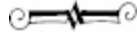
“Us? Don’t be so nocky. We’ve done nothing. Lots of coves have had quarrels with Missus, wanting the dosh they lent her. She never paid anybody back, remember? It’s nothing to do with us.”

“What if that cove thinks we know something?”

“But we don’t, do we? We don’t know anything.”

He made it clear the talk was over, and Freddie didn’t want to risk spoiling the momentary softness. George was probably right. Nobody had a reason to come after them. Nevertheless, he inched closer and lay with his eyes open for a long time, watching the candle flicker and finally go out.

CHAPTER SEVEN



Maud Pedlow woke with a start, the fear that sleep temporarily had held at bay broke through into consciousness. She lay unmoving, watching a patch of sunlight tremble on the ceiling. Walter was snuffing beside her and she didn't want to wake him, didn't want his intrusive curiosity. He'd complained several times in the last few days that she was in a pet, liverish, moody. None of this was spoken with sympathy or an invitation to unburden herself.

Carefully she got out of the bed, soft and stale from the night. She looked down at her husband. His mouth was slightly open, his hands folded across his chest, and he hardly seemed to breathe as if even in sleep he was wary of the world. She moved away and reached for her wrapper. The touch of the satin was a momentary comfort but she glimpsed her reflection in the standing mirror and the silver grey and lace gown seemed drab and ghostlike.

Maud had long given up regretting her marriage. She was thirty years of age when Walter proposed to her, and she was quite aware of her choices. There had been no other suitors willing to brave the bastion of her disfigurement, and her father was not wealthy enough to sweeten the lure. Walter was a widower, one year older than her own father, and she found him humourless and crotchety. However, he had social position and money, her father was ailing, and she knew that trying to live on pretensions and a tiny income with her mother was a bleak prospect. She accepted Walter's offer of marriage at once.

At the bedroom door she paused. Downstairs she could hear the household stirring as the servants began their chores for the day. The tea cups clinked on the breakfast tray, the shovel clattered in the ashes of the stove. A male voice, probably Meredith, laughed and was answered by a burst of high-pitched giggling, quickly suppressed, from the young maid, Susan.

“Do your duty,” her mother whispered to her timidly the night before her wedding. “You can’t afford to be haughty.” That was the only instruction as to conjugal life she received, but she was grateful to Walter, wanted to love him. She was quite prepared to be affectionate and do what married women were required to do.

On their first night together he had fallen asleep, and she assumed he was being considerate of her inexperience. The second night, he mounted her without preamble, penetrated her painfully and quickly, but complained about how difficult it was. They had attempted relations only once after that, unsuccessfully. Walter sometimes liked to lie beside her and take his own pleasure while looking at her naked body but even that was not often. Maud soon settled into the common rut of wives with inconsiderate husbands. She busied herself with a round of dining engagements and took undue pleasure from expensive clothes. She was always in search of new medical discoveries that could repair her face but found none.

There were no candles lit in the hall sconces, but the morning light had crept in sufficiently for her to make her way to the nursery tucked away on the third floor. Hoping the latest maid, Betsy, was not yet awake, Maud hurried up the stairs and entered Sarah’s room. The child was sleeping but as Maud came over to the bed, she turned restlessly, kicking away her quilt. The room was warm and close and Maud frowned. She had asked Betsy always to keep the window open, winter or summer, but the girl said too many flies came in and at night she closed it. Maud gently pulled

the quilt all the way off and placed her hand on Sarah's forehead, smoothing away the fine hair that was sticking to her cheek. She yearned to stroke the soft skin, trace the delicate arch of the dark brows, but she was afraid her touch would burn.

She had been married for nine years when she first met Henry Pedlow, Walter's nephew. He was living in Vancouver and came to Toronto en route to taking a position with a pharmaceutical firm in India. Walter was away at the time, on the circuit, but dutifully she invited Henry to stay at the house.

Before two days had elapsed she was passionately in love with him.

He was dark-haired, rather plump, with soft brown eyes that gazed on her in admiration, not seeming to notice the purple naevus, the swollen and pulled lip. He made her laugh, noticed every new gown, and seemed content to be in her company all day long. The night before he was due to depart, she had virtually asked him to be her lover. "You can stay," she had said, stumbling over her words, ashamed that she was so awkward because of course he was already staying, sleeping in the room next to hers. But he understood and had responded with warmth, kissing her deformed mouth, which no one else in her life had ever done.

When he left the following morning she remained in her room for a week, refusing food, not wanting to move from the place of memory. It was only Walter's return that made her stir. She had no wish to offer explanations for her behaviour. They hadn't even known he was back in Toronto. There had been no telegram or letter, just a knock at the door less than a month ago. Fortunately, Walter was at his club and Sarah was doing lessons in the nursery. Maud was alone, reading in her sitting room when Burns announced

him. The shock had rendered her motionless and it was only when she realized the butler was eyeing her curiously that she regained some control and was able to greet him. He too was very contained, apologizing for not giving her notice. She barely heard his excuses, as if her ears had got stopped up with cotton. He continued to prattle on about the voyage over from India, the disagreeable climate there, the savagery of the natives. Maud said almost nothing, staring at him. Initially she was unable to find the semblance of the young man he had been. He seemed wizened, too old for his years, as if his flesh were losing a battle against the dominance of the Pedlow frame. He had grown a full moustache and his hair was longer than it should have been, but neither gave the impression of vitality. It was only when she saw his slender hands that were so agonizingly familiar to her that she truly remembered, that her body remembered, and the impulse to kiss again the soft, full lips was so strong she had to stand and walk to the window.

Suddenly the door to the adjoining room opened and Betsy came in.

“Oh I beg pardon, madam, I...is there anything wrong?”

Maud stepped back and whispered angrily, “The child is too hot, give her a cool sponge-down as soon as she wakes.”

The maid knew better than to protest. It was not the first time Maud had come into the nursery at the oddest hours, and Betsy was well aware she was one of a long line of servants who had proved unsuitable to take care of the little girl.

Maud hesitated, not wanting to wake Sarah at this early hour but wanting her to be up, hungry for her welcoming smile. But the maid was watching her and she left the nursery, her need squeezing at her chest.

The church bells were ringing through the city, peal after peal until only the deaf or the incorrigibly slothful could lie abed. Episcopalian were more prevalent, closely followed by the Methodist chimes and trailed by the Roman Catholic. Sinners from all denominations stirred as they were called to prayer.

William Murdoch had been up for over an hour doing his exercises. On Sundays he didn't ride, but before Mass he stripped to his singlet and drawers, pushed back the drugget on the floor of his sitting room, and did knee bends and push-ups until his muscles screamed for a respite.

Hands behind his head, he did four more squats, grunting with the effort. "Seventy-seven, seventy-eight, seventy-nine, eighty." With a gasp he collapsed on the floor. Done.

From the next room he heard Enid singing a Welsh tune that was rousing and vigorous, like a gospel hymn. He paused for a minute to listen to her but the thought of how different their beliefs actually were depressed him and he jumped up. He had ten minutes more of exercise to do before he had to wash and change into his Sunday clothes. Mrs. Jones was now singing a rather plaintive tune in English about being in the hands of Jesus. Murdoch started to run vigorously on the spot until the noise of his own breathing drowned out the song.

The leaves of the willow tree danced in the breeze, and the movement of light and shadow across her face woke Lily. She shivered. The cave where she had slept was dank, and the night had been uncomfortably cold. She didn't have enough room to stretch her legs out straight and they felt cramped and stiff. She sat up as well as she could and eased herself cautiously to the opening of her hiding place in the riverbank. She had no way of knowing if people were

close by and she moved carefully until she peeked through the curtain of willow branches. The sun had disappeared behind clouds but there was enough warmth to feel good on her cold face and hands. There was nobody on the opposite bank and on this side of the river there was no path at all so she didn't fear anybody coming that way. She, herself, entered the hide-away by edging sideways close to the riverbank. She'd found the hiding place last summer when, after another beating by Dolly, she'd run off. An old willow tree had fallen into the river, and where the roots pulled out of the ground there was a hollow. The branches hid it from view and when she had crawled into the cool gloom, like a she-fox coming home, she felt safe.

She bent down and splashed water over her face and neck. Hunger had kept her awake at first, but this morning that had gone and she felt nothing except thirst. She cupped her hand and lapped the river water. For two days she had sat by the opening, crouched within the leaves, watchful. The birds were her warning, whether they suddenly took flight or continued their usual coming and going around her. Yesterday she had felt bolder and ventured out looking for wild berries. She tried not to think, but suddenly the memory would lump into her mind. Not just of the big policeman in his helmet whom she'd seen coming up the path of her mother's house but the other men in uniform from before. Their faces red and angry, shaking their fists at her when she wouldn't walk down the cold corridor to her cell. She tried frantically to make them understand, she wasn't being bad, wasn't defiant, but her sounds only seemed to anger them the more. Her mother had made it clear with gestures and a crude drawing that Lily was going to be hanged. That the gallows was in that room at the end of the corridor. But before she died, Lily would be tortured, hot pokers would be thrust in her eyes and she'd be put on a rack and stretched until all her bones

were broken. Her mother had shown her a drawing in an old book. "Just like this," she thumped the page with her finger.

First women, stiff and forbidding in their dark dresses and aprons, came to take her but she fought so fiercely, they sent for the men. Two big guards roughly subdued her and dragged her into the cell. They didn't know, because she couldn't tell them, why she struggled so desperately. Finally, they tied her into a chair and put a cloth tight about her mouth to silence the screaming. After a while the matron sent for Dolly. She was shamed into soothing her daughter, and although she managed to pinch her when the matron wasn't looking, she did communicate to Lily that she wasn't going to be tortured and hanged. Yet! That if she was very, very good and did everything she was told she would be let out. And just possibly, her mother, whom she had disgraced, would take her back.

These were the memories that Lily tried to keep away. Now, her mother was dead. It was her fault and if the men came again and the judge with his white hair, she would be forced back to that place and Dolly would not save her this time. She trembled and moaned as she wiped her eyes with her wet hands.

The waiter had knocked two or three times before Henry heard him.

"Your breakfast, sir."

Henry looked at his watch, which he'd placed on the bedside table. It was almost noon. He had slept a deep, drugged sleep that left him feeling thick-tongued and sluggish. The waiter called again and he forced himself to sit up.

"Leave it outside," he shouted with a rush of anger.

He wasn't hungry, rarely was these days, just perpetually thirsty, his throat always burning. He reached over to light the lamp on the bedside table. He kept the

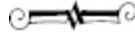
curtains closed. He didn't want the sunlight, didn't want a reminder that life was going on outside his room, that people with futures to think of were walking on the street, talking, laughing with each other.

He got out of bed slowly and went over to the washstand. He tilted the mirror so he could get a better view, tugged off his blood-spotted nightshirt, and contemplated his naked body. For a long time now, this had become his morning ritual. It was foolish, morbid really, because what he saw was the inexorable progress of his disease. Abruptly he dropped to his knees and clasped his hands together in prayer. He went to church on a regular basis but it was perfunctory, polite behaviour and he knew it. However, this morning he longed to reach a God who had long seemed indifferent.

"Our Father which art in Heaven, forgive me for what I have done. I am a sinner. You have punished me, Lord, and I will try to accept Your punishment as it is just. I repent. You who see into my heart, forgive me I beg, but as it be Your will and not mine. Amen."

He repeated the Lord's Prayer over and over until finally his knees ached and he was forced to get to his feet. He had achieved no peace of mind. His prayers were barren.

CHAPTER EIGHT



The twelve jurors, together with family and friends eager to witness the proceedings, were jammed into the reception room of Humphrey's. Only Tim Pritchard was impassive. He sat back, drawing on his pipe, ignoring everybody else and irritating the shirt off all of them by his air of superiority. He had served on a coroner's jury last January when a prostitute had been found strangled on the frozen lake. He considered himself an old hand at the inquest business.

Murdoch was a bit late and he slipped into the back of the room. There were no more chairs to be had, so he stood and leaned against the wall. Crabtree was serving as constable of the court, and when he entered, like schoolchildren when the teacher comes in, the spectators fell silent immediately.

The constable went over to a lectern provided for the purpose, cleared his throat, and in a booming voice, made his announcement.

"Listen here, everybody. I have a message from the coroner, Mr. Johnson. To wit." He unfolded a piece of paper and read.

"Gentlemen, the court doth dismiss you for this time but requires you severally to appear here again Friday, on the twenty-sixth day of July instant at the seventh hour of the clock in the evening precisely, upon pain of forty dollars a man on the condition contained in your recognizance entered into."

There was a silence as the spectators tried to sort their way through the thicket of legal language.

"What's all that mean, Constable?" called out Dick Meadows.

"It means the inquest is adjourned," answered Pritchard, who was sitting in the row in front. A murmur of disappointment rippled through the crowd. "And if you don't come back you have to cough up forty bills," he added.

"Hey, sod that," said a man in front who had the muscles and language of a labourer. "I'm off on a frigging run next Friday. I don't do it, I don't get no sodding wages."

"Too bad. Then you'll have to pay the forfeit."

"Is that true, Constable?" the man asked.

"Yes, he's right," said Crabtree. "You'll have to change your shift. You've been sworn. And you there. You watch your language or you'll get a charge. There are ladies present."

The man didn't take the reprimand well. "Why's the shicey thing being postponed?"

"Because Mr. Johnson has been taken poorly, that's why. And you're in the queen's court, don't forget. I don't want to hear one more word out of your mouth. Of any kind."

"If he leaves Dolly Shaw much longer she'll be turning all of our stomachs," called out another man.

"That's no concern of yours. You're here to do your duty no matter what."

"And who'll put bread in my kid's stomach while her pa is adoin' his duty? Will you?"

Crabtree bristled. "You've had your warning, Charles Piersol. One more word and you'll be held in contempt. And that surely won't feed your child."

Piersol subsided with bad grace. Crabtree picked up a second sheet of paper from the table in front of him.

"Oyez, oyez. All manner of persons who have anything more to do with this court may depart home at this time and give their attendance here again on Friday next being the twenty-sixth day of July instant at the seventh hour of the clock in the evening precisely."

The assembly began to stir, murmuring among themselves in disappointment.

"Come on then. No loitering. And don't forget, any one of you not appearing will pay for it. Got that, Piersol?"

As they all began to disperse, Murdoch went over to Crabtree.

"What's wrong with the coroner?"

"Poor man's got the mumps. His valet came round just now. Said he looks like a chipmunk. Very painful."

"It is. I had them when I was a lad. Anyway it's just as well he postponed. I'm not getting too far with this investigation. Can't find the daughter. She's turned into a mermaid and is still swimming down to the lake. A bit more time will give me a chance to wrap this up." Murdoch regarded his constable. "You still look queasy, George. How're you feeling?"

"About the same to tell the truth, sir. Not myself at all. My belly's cramping something fierce."

"Got the trots?"

"No, sir."

"I'll ask my landlady what she recommends. She knows a lot about medicines."

The big constable did not look well. His face was yellowish and his eyes were cloudy.

"Just try to stay out of Brackenreid's way. You know how he is. He'll be having you cupped and leeches before you can blink."

Crabtree sighed. "I'm sorry this inquest was cancelled. It was giving me a chance to stay out of the station."

Murdoch laughed and clapped him on the shoulder.
“Cheer up. I’ll come back with something from Mrs. K. and you’ll be a new man.”

“I don’t know about new, sir. The old one’d do for me.”

Murdoch left him to gather up the papers.

“I’ll see you at the station.”

It was true what George said. Getting out of Inspector Brackenreid’s sphere was a relief.

Murdoch was eating his lunch in the stuffy room the constables used for their meals. He spat out one of the many gristly bits from the pork pie he was munching, which tasted stale. His mug of tea was bitter, the last of the common pot, and after two sips he tipped it into the slop bucket. He felt distinctly bad-tempered. The incessant flies were maddening, his celluloid collar was chafing his neck, and he’d got some grease from the pie on his almost-new Windsor tie, blue Pongee silk and a Sears catalogue special. He undid the button on his collar and loosened the tie. To hell with it. If Brackenreid came in and slapped a fine on him, he’d tell him where he could stuff it. He debated whether or not to go to the trouble of making some more tea. The water was steaming in the smoke-blackened kettle on the hob, but he’d have to get up and he didn’t feel like it. He’d overdone the knee bends yesterday.

The problem was he hadn’t slept well again. He’d gone to confession on Sunday, and when the priest heard about all his lustful thoughts, he’d handed out a long penance. Good thing Murdoch wasn’t telling him everything.

The door opened and Constable Crabtree came in.

“There’s a package for you, sir. Got the coroner’s seal. Shall I put it on your desk?”

“No. Let’s see. Have a seat for a minute.”

“I’ll stand if you don’t mind, sir.”

There was a curious tone to the constable's voice and Murdoch looked up at him.

"You should book off early if you have to. Get a rest."

"Yes, sir."

As nobody got paid for time off, most of the men struggled into work no matter what their ailments. However, they both knew Crabtree would be excused with pay if it meant he remained fit for the tournament.

Murdoch opened the envelope. There was a note from Johnson.

Murdoch. I've come down with the mumps, which means I have to postpone the inquest. Given what Dr. Ogden has to say, it's probably just as well. You've got some work to do. I've reset the inquest for this coming Friday. Should be right as rain by then. Damned painful.

Your servant, Arthur Johnson.

Curiously, Murdoch turned to the handwritten sheet which was enclosed.

This is to certify that I, Julia Ogden, a legally qualified physician in the city of Toronto, did this day make a post mortem examination upon the body of a woman identified as Dolly Shaw with the following result.

The body is that of a well-nourished woman about fifty or sixty years of age. Rigor mortis and staining well marked.

General condition. Adiposity well developed.

Heart in good condition.

Liver, soft and pale, markedly fatty.

Abdominal organs, kidneys normal in size and odour.

The woman showed signs of having borne a child. There is a one-inch contusion on the occiput but it is relatively small, the dura mater beneath is not depressed or the brain ruptured. It is highly unlikely this would have been the cause of death. There was recent bruising on the shinbone of the left leg three inches below the patella. There was also a large bruise on the right forearm, five and one half inches from the wrist. This contusion had an odd criss-cross pattern, which having examined the dead woman's outer garment, to wit a flannel robe, I decided this bruise had been incurred by pressure on the arm. Considering the discovery I made on further examination, I would now posit that this bruise was the result of some person pinning down the dead woman, probably by kneeling on her arm.

Murdoch read that bit again. The doctor was sounding unnecessarily dramatic to him. However the next sentence said otherwise.

I discovered traces of foreign material lodged in the nasal passages, although some had been ingested deep into the lungs. These traces were green in colour and under the glass seemed in my opinion consistent with a material such as cotton or wool. Perhaps more likely wool. Given the position of the body, the woman could not have smothered by accident. I have to conclude therefore that she died from forceful suffocation, likely from a person holding a cloth or pillow over her face. I am yours truly,

An illegible signature followed.
"Damnation! I missed it, Crabtree."

“Sir?”

“I was only too ready to assume she was some old sot who’d conked her head.”

He told him what the doctor had written and Crabtree shrugged sympathetically.

“Don’t blame yourself too much, Mr. Murdoch. That’s what we all thought. Including the coroner.”

“I should have been more thorough.”

“Don’t know what you would have found. You couldn’t look in her throat,” said Crabtree reasonably.

“Johnson wants a report by Friday. Let’s hope those two boys haven’t turned the place upside down and there’s still something to investigate.”

“Do you think somebody knew about her money and was intending to rob her? They might have got panicky when they realized she was done for and scarpered off?”

“Pretty thick-headed robber if that’s the case, but it’s not out of the question.”

He stuffed his remaining piece of pie into a tin kept for the purpose so it would be safe from the mice. He was angry with himself. Brackenreid would love the opportunity to find fault, he always did. He’d never been happy with having Murdoch foisted on him. One of Stark’s new men and a Papist to boot. More than that, however, Murdoch was dismayed at his own complacency.

“Let me talk to this doctor, then we’ll go over there.”

The constable shifted his feet and winced.

“You all right?” Murdoch asked him. For answer Crabtree’s eyes rolled back in his head and with one smooth, unbroken motion he fell backwards. Murdoch was irrepressibly reminded of a Douglas fir crashing to the ground in the forest.

The constable had come around quickly, refused to go home, but agreed to stay in the off-duty room for a little

while longer. Fortunately, Brackenreid was out at a fire-hall inspection and couldn't make a fuss. Murdoch left Crabtree perched on a chair sipping fresh tea and went into the outer office. A young constable, second class, was manning the telephone and telegraph.

"Call up one-three-seven-eight for me, will you, Phillips."

The constable plugged in his wire and dialled the number. The call was obviously answered immediately.

"Just a minute please, a caller for you from number-four station." He indicated the telephone to Murdoch, who put the receiver to his ear and bent down to speak.

"Hello?"

"Yes," said a female voice. "What can I do for you?"

"I'd like to speak to Dr. Ogden."

"This is she."

Murdoch felt a flash of impatience.

"Nurse, please put me through to the doctor. I'm in a hurry."

"And so am I, sir. Will you state your business? This *is* Dr. Ogden to whom you are speaking."

Murdoch shot a quick glance at the sheet of paper in his hand. He'd not paid attention to the preamble. The physician's name was Julia.

"I, er, beg your pardon, madam, er, doctor—"

She cut him short but there was amusement in her voice. "That's quite all right. I'm used to it. Dr. Stowe and I are a minority of two in this city. We are constantly being mistaken for our nurses. However, I assume you have not called to discuss the challenges I face being a lady doctor."

"Not today, ma'am, although I'm sure it is a fascinating tale. My name is Murdoch, William Murdoch, and I'm acting detective at number-four station. I just received your report on the post mortem examination of Dolly Shaw."

"Yes?" The doctor's voice was wary, expecting criticism.

"You mention a small contusion at the back of the head. Do you think it happened before or after she was

smothered?"

There was a pause at the other end of the line, then she said, "What is your point, Mr. Murdoch?"

"If Mrs. Shaw fell, hit her head on the fender, and then was suffocated, it wouldn't be that hard to do. But she was a heavy woman. If she was overpowered, suffocated, then dragged to the fender in an attempt to disguise the murder, her assailant would have to be strong."

"A man, then."

"Possibly, although some women are equal in strength to men."

She laughed. "A hit, sir, a palpable hit. Frankly, it is impossible to determine whether the injury occurred very shortly after death or very shortly before. There is little bleeding."

"Could the blow have rendered her unconscious?"

She sighed. "I wish I could be more definite but I'm afraid I cannot say. She had so much liquor in her stomach, I would think she was staggering drunk. An easy pushover-literally. She may have fallen and banged her head on the fender, been dazed, and...well I suppose her assailant could have taken advantage of that. Her gown, by the way, was splattered with beer, but from the pattern, I'd say the liquor was thrown down on her rather than she herself spilling it. Perhaps to reinforce the notion of her inebriety."

"Dr. Ogden, if you get tired of medicine you could be a consultant for the police force."

"Not very likely, Mr. Murdoch. I've met Colonel Grasett. I don't think he would believe a word I said."

Privately Murdoch thought the police chief had difficulty accepting anything anybody said, other than himself, but he didn't say so. He didn't want to overstep the mark and get too comradely with the lady. He was enjoying the conversation so far.

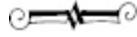
"Mr. Murdoch? I'm sorry I've not been of much help."

“You have, ma’am. Whatever the sequence, this was deliberate murder.”

“That I concur with.”

She said her good-bye and hung up. Murdoch replaced the receiver on the stand. She must be quite young because it was only recently that lady doctors could be licensed. He wondered what she looked like.

CHAPTER NINE



Constable Robert Wiggin was the only officer available to assist, and Murdoch wasn't happy about it. He didn't like or respect the man. Wiggin was sallow-faced and lanky, with a caved-in chest that no amount of reprimand from Seymour the duty sergeant could straighten. He bullied the unfortunates who ended up in the jail, but was smooth as butter around his superiors. If the inspector were to ask for an arse wipe, the constable would have done it.

Murdoch set a brisk pace over to River Street, and he took a rather mean pleasure in the fact that the constable was quite winded when they reached the corner.

The house looked abandoned, all the curtains drawn, the black ribbon on the door drooped.

"Stand back a bit, will you, Wiggin, don't want to scare them into next year."

Murdoch thumped hard with the knocker and after a few minutes the door was opened a crack. A pair of frightened eyes peeked out at him.

"Hello, Freddie, isn't it? Can I come in?"

The boy nodded and stepped back. George appeared behind him. He too looked afraid, although he had more air of bravado than the younger lad. Murdoch entered the hall, which reeked of cigars.

"We've got to have a talk, my bravos. Kitchen?"

Freddie glanced quickly at George, who nodded. Both boys were even more unkempt than before. Murdoch followed them into the kitchen, which was lit by a single candle on the pine table. The stub end of a cigar sat in a

used plate. He wondered how they had been taking care of themselves and he felt guilty that he hadn't given them more thought.

"Has Miss Lily come back yet?"

George answered. "No, we haven't seen hide nor hair of her, have we, Freddie?"

The boy shook his head.

Murdoch paused. He didn't know how to proceed. He didn't want to shock them unnecessarily.

"Boys, I want you to tell me the truth. No con do you hear? On your honour, so help you God."

They stared at him.

"The night your foster mother died, was there any kind of barney? Did she and Lily have a set-to, for instance?"

They both tensed but George said, "They was always having rows. Never stopped, did it, Freddie? She went at Lily terrible."

"Did Lily fight back?"

"Sometimes."

"Did they go at it Thursday?"

"Don't remember."

"Freddie, what about you?"

"Don't remember," he whispered.

"Did anybody else come in to visit? A neighbour for instance? Late I mean."

"We was in bed, sir. Fast asleep."

"So your answer is no or don't know?"

"Don't know, sir."

Murdoch pushed aside the plate with the cigar. "I'm asking because we've got new information about the way Mrs. Shaw died."

"She fell didn't she, sir? And topped her noggin."

"That's what we thought, George, but it's not true. I'm afraid somebody killed her."

"Done in?" George gasped.

"Yes, done in."

"How?"

"She was suffocated."

"On purpose?" Still uncomprehending. Or pretending to be.

"Yes, on purpose. Probably with some kind of pillow. That's why I'm asking you if anybody had a barney with her. If you heard anything."

He gave them a chance to answer but they both stared at him, looking frightened, especially Freddie.

"I'm going to have a look in the parlour in a minute. See what I can find. Have you been in there?"

Again the vigorous shaking of heads. Believable this time. Murdoch stood up. "If you do remember anything, I want you to come straight down to the station and tell me. And when Lily comes back you've got to make her understand that we need to talk to her. Can you do that?"

"Yes, sir. We will, won't we, Freddie?"

At the door Murdoch hesitated. "How are you boys managing? Have you got work yet, George?"

"No, sir. I'm going out tomorrow to look. They always needs bun boys down at the stables. I'll try there."

Again Murdoch wished he had taken more care. Freddie was a child and George not much more.

"Come and see me next week if you haven't got anything."

He went back to the front door. The constable had positioned himself at the bottom of the steps, in guard position.

"Start having a look around the front and back of the house, will you, Wiggin."

"Yes, sir." He hesitated. "What exactly am I looking for, sir? I haven't been on this sort of investigation before."

Murdoch waved him off. "Use your brain, Wiggin. Wake it up. Collect anything you think might have relevance."

He went back into the dark hall and over to the parlour. A waft of rotten air hit him as he entered the room. Most of

the odour came from the dishes that were still sitting where Dolly had left them, with leftover food on them. The boys were certainly telling the truth about not coming in here. It was untouched since he'd last been.

Given what he now knew, the Turkish couch took on a new and sinister aspect. There were two pillows, one brown, one emerald green. He picked up the green one, which was on the floor. The cover was knitted and the words *Love Conquers All* were oversewn in red. He replaced it gingerly. He'd take it in to Dr. Ogden to examine. The grimy sheet on the couch was rumpled and the sateen comforter was half off, dragging on the floor. He couldn't tell if that was an indication of a struggle, however, or just of an untidy housekeeper. He began to inch slowly around the room, studying everything with new eyes.

The second Morris chair by the hearth had served as Dolly's wardrobe. Her skirt, a black cotton lined with canvas, and her grey silk waist, very stained, were draped across the back of the chair. He moved them aside. Underneath were her undergarments. Somewhat squeamishly, he gave them a cursory examination. There was a pair of stays, most of the laces broken and knotted, a white underskirt, and a pair of dirty drawers. No stockings.

He tried the desk but it was locked and he left it for the moment. Next to it in the corner was a triangular glass-fronted hutch, and he opened it up. The shelves inside were bare, no display of fine china dishes or glass-ware here. The dust was thick enough to write a letter in, but nobody had been that helpful. He moved on. The window that faced River Street intervened. The flowered velvet curtain was closed and he lifted the corner to peek outside. The street was deserted, but he fancied that at the same time he had lifted his curtain a neighbour across the road had dropped hers. He returned to his task.

The top of the sideboard was covered with figurines of various sizes, all nestling in dust balls. At one end was a gilt

birdcage, empty, at the other a pitcher and bowl. The pitcher was half-filled with water and inevitably was now the swimming hole for several flies, some still struggling. Next to it was a dish crusted with the remnants of what was once some kind of stew, and beside that two empty glasses. He opened the right-hand drawer of the sideboard. It was empty. So was the left drawer and the lower cupboards. Mrs. Shaw seemed to have preferred to have furniture for show rather than function. Given the poverty of the house itself, these pieces were quite swell.

The japanned side table by the couch told him nothing except that Dolly did not have a green thumb. The fern in its brass pot was wilting badly. He reached for the pitcher and watered the poor plant, flies and all. That left the desk. He went out to the hall.

“George!”

As fast as a jack-in-the-box, the boy’s head popped through the kitchen door.

“Yes, sir?”

“I want to have a look in the desk here but it’s locked. Any notion where the key is?”

George shook his head. “No, sir. We never went in Missus’s room. Weren’t allowed.”

Murdoch returned to the parlour, almost ready to retch at the foul air. He took out a clasp knife from his pocket, opened the blade, and pried open the lock. It yielded easily. He rolled back the curtain top. The inside was nearly bare: a blotting pad, well used, an inkwell with the top off, and a steel pen. Sitting on top of the blotter was an empty tin that had once held Frey’s Homeopathic Cocoa. There was no lid. At the rear of the desk was a large jar, containing what looked like herbs. There was a label, torn and faded, the writing almost illegible. He could just make out the word *Comfrey*. The cubbyholes were all empty, and all that was in the two drawers was a bag of boiled fruit candies that had melted together. He lifted the blotter and underneath was

tucked a piece of notepaper. It was good quality, thick and creamy, but the edge was ragged as if it had been torn from a book.

There was no salutation, but in large letters was written,

I'm sure you remember the occasion of our first meeting. I have had some family troubles which has forced me into changing my name for reasons of privacy as I am sure you of all people can understand. I did as good by you as I could. Times are hard, my business has fallen off. A small gratuity would be kindly received. Or else

The letter stopped there. Murdoch read it through again. The threat of the last two words was intriguing. Had it been written recently or was it of the same vintage as the candies? He couldn't tell. What was her business? The neighbour said she didn't do anything and that her daughter supported them. What were her family troubles and did any of this have to do with her murder? The letter cast a different light on the money he'd found in Dolly's pocket. Was she into blackmail? Maybe the five-hundred dollars was pay-off money? People with something to hide can get desperate if threatened with discovery.

There were two banks of drawers on each side of the desk and he pulled them open. Dolly had used this piece of furniture as her pantry. In every drawer was some food: stale bread, mouldy cake, a piece of black meat crawling with maggots.

He was just about to close up the bottom one when he glimpsed the end of a calling card sticking out from beneath a saucer that had found its way into the drawer. He plucked it out. In plain black lettering was the name *Mrs. Walter Pedlow*. The cardboard was bent and dirty but of good quality stock. He frowned. The name had unpleasant

associations for him. Walter Pedlow was a judge, and Murdoch had been a witness in his court a few years ago. Pedlow had seemed harsh, erratic, and of great personal vanity, an unfortunate combination of qualities in a judge. What was Dolly Shaw doing with the calling card of his honour's wife? He put both the letter and card in one of the envelopes he'd brought with him and stowed it in his pocket. On an impulse, he shook out some of the herbal mixture that was in the jar and also put that in an envelope. Finally, he pulled out some of the threads from the emerald pillow and saved them.

For the next several moments, he stood looking around the room, trying to read the story of what had happened. But there were still too many variables and he felt frustrated with them.

He went back to the kitchen.

George and Freddie were at the table, not doing anything that he could see, except waiting.

"Come on, boys. I have to look upstairs and you might as well come with me."

Mutely, they followed him up the stairs to the landing. There were two doors, both closed.

"Whose is whose?"

"That's ours," said George, pointing to the one on the left.

"Come on then, open up."

George opened the door and Murdoch stepped into the small bare room. There was a narrow bed against the wall, a washstand, and a chair. Nothing else.

"Excuse me, sir," Freddie said timidly. "But could I ask you what you're looking for?"

Murdoch grinned and ruffled the boy's hair.

"Anything that don't belong."

Freddie looked puzzled. "Nothing belongs really, sir. Was all Mrs. Mother's."

George didn't say anything. His turned-in eyes made it difficult to read his thoughts.

"All right, next room. Is that one Miss Shaw's?"

"Do you mean Lily?" asked Freddie.

George thumped him hard on the arm. "Don't be so nocky. 'Course that's who he means."

The boys behind him like an entourage, Murdoch went across the landing and opened the door to the other room. In the bright morning light the little chamber seemed almost cheery. The quilt on the bed was colourful, the edge of the huckaback towel on the washstand was crocheted in white, and another doily covered the top of the small dresser.

"Wait here, boys."

He closed them out. It seemed more respectful to give the absent woman the dignity of a private search. He started with the dresser which, like the furniture downstairs, was good oak. The mirror was missing but otherwise it was in excellent condition. He was curious about the objects that were placed on it. In the centre was a black marble clock. Once probably beautiful, it no longer had hands and only two bits of the coloured inlay were left on the facing. Beside it was a china dog, about six inches high. The eyes were blank and most of the nose was gone as if in some fierce fight. It sat lopsidedly because it had no rear leg but there was a clean, red ribbon around its neck. He replaced it carefully. On the left side of the overbearing clock was a posy of field daisies in a cracked crystal vase. Lily had obviously collected discarded treasures, attempting to make beauty bloom in the barren desert of her life.

He pulled open the top drawer of the dresser. It contained a plain flannel nightgown, a woollen undervest, and two pairs of black knitted stockings, neatly rolled up. He felt around the edges of the drawer. There was something underneath the clothes. He lifted out the nightgown, and lying underneath it was a black leather-covered book. The pages were edged in gilt and the lettering was red and gold.

The Royal Path of Life , illustrated by the Reverend Potts. A serious and portentous tome, “Designed to elevate the tone, purify the heart, and strengthen the character of all who accept its teachings.” The book was pristine, but he didn’t know if it was buried beneath Lily’s nightgown because she considered it precious or useless. He turned to the frontispiece, which was protected by tissue paper. There was a stamp below the title: Awarded to Lily Merishaw for perfect attendance at Markham Village Sunday School, December 1864. That was thirty-one years ago. He could hear the two boys whispering together outside. He opened the door. They were sitting on the floor.

“Did your foster mother ever use another name that you know of?”

“Like what, sir? What sort of name?”

“Merishaw. Did she ever call herself Dolly Merishaw?”

George shook his head. “Don’t remember that, sir.”

“Freddie? Do you?”

“No, sir.”

“What about Lily? Did she ever refer to herself as Lily Merishaw?”

George grinned. “She don’t talk, sir. Only grunt like the pigs. She don’t read nor write neither.”

“All right. You two can go back downstairs. I’m almost done here.”

Murdoch returned to the dresser and replaced the book where he’d found it. The second drawer held only a clean pair of undergarments and a cotton corset cover. What other clothes Lily had, she must have been wearing. The pitcher on the washstand was filled, the chamber underneath the bed was empty. It was highly likely that the woman was the perpetrator of a violent crime against her own mother, but standing here in this neat room Murdoch felt more compassion than disgust. He had the sense of a person striving for some betterment. The contrast with the refuse pile that her mother had lived in was striking.

As he went downstairs to join George and Freddie, Constable Wiggin entered.

"I've searched the yards, sir. Can't say I found anything special except this cigar snip."

He handed his prize to Murdoch.

"Where was it?"

"Near the gate. Seems quite fresh."

Murdoch placed it in his remaining envelope. Given the crowd of onlookers who'd been hanging around the house, the snip probably came from one of them, but he wanted to be thorough.

"I'm almost done here. Just got to have a look around the kitchen. Why don't you start talking to the neighbours. Go down River Street. I'll go across the road."

"Yes, sir. Anything in particular I should ask them?"

"Nothing in particular. Just if they are the one who smothered Dolly."

"Yes, sir."

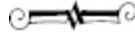
"Wiggin, wait. That was a joke. An attempt at humour."

"Oh, I see."

"Ask them if they heard anything on Thursday night. Find out what they were doing, what they felt about the dead woman. That sort of thing."

The constable left and Murdoch wondered again why the man had chosen a career in the police force. His kind gave everybody a bad name.

CHAPTER TEN



Neither the kitchen nor the cellar had given out any new information, and Murdoch walked across the road to start his questioning with the neighbours directly opposite. The ones who had shown interest in what he was doing earlier.

The trim on the house opposite was freshly painted in a popular dark green, and there were lace curtains at the windows. Both the brass door knocker and boot scraper showed evidence of diligent polishing. A house-proud woman lived here. It was she who opened the door, a plump, short woman, plain and neat in brown taffeta. He explained who he was and with a flurry of excitement, she showed him into the front parlour and went to fetch her husband. He was John Golding and she was his wife, Mary, she said breathlessly.

Mr. Golding was stocky, of middle age, and like his wife neatly and soberly dressed. The startling thing about him, however, was that his face and neck were covered with white, funguslike tubercles. Murdoch couldn't help his own reflexive reaction to look away.

"I was just about to make a pot of tea, Mr. Murdoch. Can I bring you one? Or would you prefer coffee?" said Mrs. Golding, providing a distraction while her husband seated himself.

"Tea would be splendid," replied Murdoch, also welcoming the diversion.

Mary Golding had shown him into their parlour, as neat and sober as the couple themselves. Murdoch had the impression of brown everywhere. The lace curtains cut down

on the light, and given Mr. Golding's appearance, he wondered how much that was deliberate. Golding spoke first. His voice was hearty and resonant.

"No need to be embarrassed, Detective Murdoch. I'm used to people shying away. I've had these growths for going on five years. God in His wisdom has seen fit to try me."

"Is there anything can be done?"

"I stopped going to doctors years ago. They all wanted to have sketches made of me for one of their textbooks. That or get me to come down to the medical school as an exhibit for the young men. No thank you. This affliction came and it'll go when God wants it to."

Murdoch's gaze was steadier now, and he could see weariness and pain in Golding's eyes in spite of his pious words. He wondered how his wife tolerated God's affliction. At that point, she came back into the room. If the dreadful growths bothered her she gave no sign.

"Here you are, Mr. Murdoch."

She must have quickly taken out the best china because his cup and saucer were of a fine pattern and light as an eggshell. The tea was strong and rich, much more palatable than the brew at the station. He took some sips and waited to allow Mrs. Golding to settle like a timid bird back into her nest.

"The reason I'm here is to ask you both a few questions about Mrs. Shaw, your neighbour. As I'm sure you know, she was found dead on Thursday last."

They nodded. Mr. Golding's tuberous growths actually swayed. Murdoch was reminded of sea anemones.

"I regret to say that according to the doctor who conducted the post mortem examination, Mrs. Shaw didn't die from natural causes. She met with foul play."

Golding clicked his tongue. "Doesn't surprise me."

"Why is that?"

He leaned forward and Murdoch tried not to flinch. "Me and Mrs. Golding here are strong churchgoers, Baptist. Dolly Shaw never set foot in any church that I know of." He paused and glanced over to his wife. "Mary, perhaps you could warm up the pot for us."

"But John—"

"Mary, if you please," he said, and with a little sigh of resignation she left the room.

When the door had closed behind her, Golding continued with lowered voice.

"Lots of times my whole body aches something fierce and it keeps me awake. Many a night I've just sat in Mary's rocker there and watched the sun come up." Another pause. Murdoch noticed that Golding's hands were afflicted with the growths as well.

"I've seen people coming and going over at Dolly Shaw's house when all law-abiding Christians should be home in their bed. And I tell you, Officer Murdoch, those people are all of the female kind. All women and none of them Christian, believe me."

Murdoch wasn't completely sure what he was getting at. Golding saw his frown.

"To put a blunt tongue on it, Mr. Murdoch, that woman used to be a midwife, and she no doubt knows all sorts of ways to help those godforsaken women out of their trouble. That's what they go to her for, you mark my words. And if there's one kind of murder going on, you're paving the way for another. That's why I said I wasn't surprised."

He tapped the side of his nose with his forefinger. "The woman also drank like a guardsman. Every day, the daughter, poor woman, or one of those benighted boys would bring her jugs of beer. They'd get it cheap from the Dominion Brewery on Queen Street there. Must have been stale as a beggar's crust."

He eyed Murdoch speculatively. "Mrs. Golding and me are Temperance." For a minute Murdoch thought he was

going to demand to know if he'd taken the pledge, but he forestalled the question with one of his own.

"Did you happen to see anybody coming or going last Thursday night?"

"Certainly did. That night was a bad one. I was burning like I'd been dipped in acid. I was seated right here in the rocker, trying to get some peace, when I seen a young woman come. About midnight, I'd say. Maybe just after. She started pounding on the door over there without any care that law-abiding folks was in their beds."

Quickly Murdoch took out his notebook and pencil.

"What did this woman look like?"

"She was wearing one of those waterproof cloaks, although there was not the smidge sign of rain. Trying to disguise herself she was. Didn't fool me. I saw her face when she passed under the light. I recognized her at once. She's a singer down at the Derby on Queen Street."

"How'd you know?"

"Tuesday last I was at that tavern." He smiled. "Don't misunderstand me, Mr. Murdoch, I was doing a bit of preaching. Outside. They won't let us in, of course. Me and a couple of fellows and ladies from the league go out regularly to the taverns."

"Have any luck?" Murdoch couldn't help interjecting.

"Oh, yes. Why just two weeks ago I had this young fellow on his knees praying with me. He signed the pledge there and then. Said he was a married man and a father and the demon drink was destroying him. As it does, officer, as it does."

He looked as if he was about to launch into a speech.

"Could you continue with what you were saying about the woman?"

"Yes, well, me and Miss Yielding were working that night. She's a mighty fine speaker when she gets going, can reel 'em in like sprats on spawning day. Turned out the young woman in question was performing at the Derby." He

snorted. "I dignify it by saying performing. All she does is wear skimpy clothes and sing suggestive songs. Don't take much talent to do that, does it?"

"I suppose not."

"Anyways, just as we got there and was handing out our leaflets at the door this one waltzes by. Big hat with red feathers and a red striped dress revealing as much as Mother Nature ever gave her if you ask me. Miss Yielding stepped forward to give her a leaflet. She took it, glanced at it, then laughed out loud and tossed it to the ground. Rude as you like. Well, my companion was a bit affronted by this, and so she should have been. She came at that daughter of Eve again but she shoved her aside. I mean shoved, like she was some kind of ruffian. Poor Miss Yielding fell down. Wet it was that night, and she fair ruined her skirt."

"You're sure it was the same woman who came to see Dolly?"

"Sure as a judge. I told you, I saw her clearly when she passed under the streetlamp."

"Did she go in the house?"

"She did. I watched. I must confess to being a bit curious as our paths had already crossed as it were."

"Did you see her leave?"

Golding paused. "To be God honest, I did not actually see her. I had taken a sleeping draught, and wouldn't you know, it sent me off soon after that Jezebel arrived. But I did wake up about two by the clock there. I heard footsteps skittering down the street as if the Devil himself was snapping at her heels. Which he probably was, given what she'd done."

"We don't know that for certain, Mr. Golding," protested Murdoch. "What direction did the steps go in?"

"She headed off westerly along Wilton."

"Same way as she came?"

Golding hesitated. "Couldn't swear on the Holy Book about that. She might have, might not. But it isn't

important, surely? If she came one route and went back another, she's still one of the damned."

"Do you know her name?"

"I do indeed. After she had treated Miss Yielding so badly we asked one of the customers going into the Derby. Annie Brogan is who she is."

There was a tap on the door and his wife poked her head in.

"Can I come in now?"

"Yes, we're all done, my dear."

Murdoch wasn't quite sure why Mrs. Golding had been banished, whether it was from delicacy given what her husband had told him or whether Golding was the kind of man who didn't believe in the woman participating in manly talk.

He stood up. "Thank you for the tea, Mrs. Golding. It hit the spot."

"Are you off to speak to that young woman?"

"I am."

He gathered freshening up the teapot wasn't all she'd been doing.

"Mr. Murdoch, is there anything I can do for those two boys?"

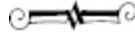
"The house is in sore need of a cleanup, but we're sort of stymied until Mrs. Shaw's daughter returns. There can be a funeral as soon as she claims the body. In the meantime..." He shrugged.

"I'll just keep an eye on them for now. I believe Lily has vanished like this before. She just seems to wander back eventually."

Golding shook his head. "What's the world coming to? By the way, Mr. Murdoch, I assume you yourself have taken the pledge."

"Won't touch a drop when I'm on duty," replied Murdoch ambiguously, and he picked up his hat and left quickly.

CHAPTER ELEVEN



Just down from the station, on Parliament Street, there was a pharmacy and Murdoch headed there first. The bell tinkled as he opened the door and stepped into the dark interior. The shop smelled of camphor. The druggist was standing behind the counter, which was laden with bottles filled with variously coloured liquids. He had large, prominent ears, twinkling eyes, and looked rather like an elf among woodland flowers. He smiled the happy welcome of somebody who hasn't seen many customers this morning. The nameplate on top of the counter said *Mr. Bright*.

"What can I do for you, sir?"

"I'm William Murdoch, acting detective at number- four station. Wonder if I could ask you a couple of questions?"

Mr. Bright's smile dimmed slightly. Not a paying customer then. However, curiosity made him cheer up.

"Ask away. Only too glad to be of service."

Murdoch took out the envelope from his pocket and gave it to the druggist.

"I wonder if you can tell me what this is?"

Mr. Bright shook out some of the mixture into his hand. He sniffed carefully, turned his head away to breathe, then smelled the substance again. Delicately, he took a pinch, rubbed it between his fingers, and tasted it. Repeated that. Finally he took a magnifying glass out of the drawer and examined the herbs. He frowned.

"Am I allowed to ask why you want to know?"

"I'm investigating a serious criminal case."

Bright nodded solemnly. "I can imagine what." He dusted off his palm. "There's a hint of liquorice smell, which means the herb pennyroyal. The woody bits are cottonwood bark by the look of it, and the green slivers are tansy. I'd have to do some proper tests if you want me to swear on oath, but I'd say that's what we've got."

Murdoch had suspected as much. They were abortifacients.

"Would these herbs be easy to come by?"

"Easy as roses. You can order a mixture like this from the Sears catalogue or you can grow them yourself. You have to know the right proportions, mind you, but there's lots who'll tell you for a bit of Judas money."

Murdoch wondered if the herbs were the reason for Dolly's late-night visitor. And if they had anything to do with the money on her person or her death.

"Thank you, Mr. Bright. You've been a great help."

For a moment, the druggist looked sorrowful.

"It's a tragic thing that young women are driven to such measures."

"Indeed."

He left the man to his ruminations and set off for the Derby.

The tavern was a narrow three-storey building sitting at the corner of King Street and Parliament, just far enough away from the grand shops not to contaminate them. There was a foundry to the left on King Street whose tall chimneys were puffing out dark, acrid columns of smoke, like a warning of hellfire. The imbibers in the tavern seemed oblivious to any such message, and as Murdoch approached he could hear the noise of raucous singing.

*"Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do.
I'm half crazy all for the love of you..."*

All of the tavern windows were up and smudges of tobacco smoke drifted out towards the street. He propped his wheel against the curb, watched idly by a small knot of men who had spilled outside and were clustered around the doorway. They yielded reluctantly as he pushed his way through and went into the tavern. The thick fug that assailed him made his eyes sting and he coughed. The room was jammed, mostly with working men. A line of choristers was standing on the benches, arms linked, pints in one hand, pipes in the other. They were swaying back and forth and singing their lungs raw.

*"It won't be a stylish marriage.
I can't afford a carriage..."*

The mob was so dense he couldn't get any further into the room, but he could see a stage at the far end with two limelights illuminating a young woman perched atop a stepladder. A board to the right of the stage announced that she was *Miss Annie Brogan: Internationally Acclaimed Chanteuse*. If she was a good singer Murdoch couldn't tell at this point because her voice was totally drowned out by her audience.

"I can't afford a carriage..."

Miss Brogan descended step by step from her ladder, her skirt hitched sufficiently to show off a dainty white boot and the edge of lace drawers. She came to the front of the stage and leaned forward, revealing a generous amount of naked, rounded flesh flowing over the top of her well-cinched bodice. Her bare arms gleamed in the white light.

"Keep going," she called out.

"You'll look sweet upon the seat of a bicycle made for two."

Murdoch began to shoulder his way through the crowd so he could get closer.

"Hey you, where's your ticket?"

A burly man in shirtsleeves who was stationed near the door grabbed him by the arm.

"I don't have one," said Murdoch.

"Thirty-five cents."

He could have fished out his identification card but he decided not to. He would rather get the lay of the land first. Knowing he was a detective had a way of changing people's normal behaviour.

He managed to get some money out of his pocket and handed it to the doorkeeper. They were standing so close their noses were only a few inches apart.

"Here. Hold on to it. No spitting and no climbing on the stage unless you're asked."

Nobody else seemed to have paid attention to either rule. The straw-strewn floor was sticky with spilled beer and expectorations of tobacco juice, and Murdoch noticed two young mashers in striped blazers were trying to get on the stage. The doorkeeper also saw them and he let out a shout of anger and began to shove his way forward. He was big and strong and pushed the customers aside ruthlessly. Murdoch followed in his wake feeling like a dinghy behind a trawler. When they reached the stage the man grabbed one of the young fellows by the leg and jerked him back to the ground. He gave a yell of pain but was good-naturedly helped to his feet by some of the audience. The second young man, who had the pale skin of a bank clerk, was standing unsteadily in front of the stepladder looking up yearningly at Annie Brogan, who had quickly retreated to

her perch. She smiled sweetly and wagged her finger in admonishment, at the same time moving up a rung. Then the manager clambered on the stage, lifted the fellow bodily, and dumped him into the crowd like a sack of coal.

Another round of “Daisy” was in full blast, but Annie held up her hand for silence. The piano player stopped in midchord, and there was a gradual quietening as the men blearily started to hush everybody up. When it was quiet enough to make herself heard, she said, “That Daisy could go on forever. She’s never spent, is she?”

The innuendo created another wave of laughter. A short sprat of a man in an old-fashioned stovepipe hat called out shrilly, “Hey, Annie, I seen your picture in the *News*. You’re famous.”

She made a big show of hanging her head. “Reverend Whittaker accused me of indecency. Me of all people...he must not be seeing so good—I wonder why that is?” She waited a moment for them to recover from that one. “All right, you men, here’s a riddle for you. I just want to know if you’re up tonight. Are you?”

Deafening shouts reverberated through the room and there were a few obscene gestures.

“Ready? What do an American, a rooster, and an old maid have in common?”

“What, Annie, what?” called various of the men.

She looked pert. “An American says, ‘Yankee, doodle do.’ A rooster says, ‘Doodle, doodle do,’ and an old maid says, ‘Any cock’ll do.’ No, wait. Wait! I got that wrong, I mean—‘any dude will do.’” Her correction was lost in the laughter. Once again she requested silence.

“Now for my favourite part of the evening...and yours...”

She nodded to the piano player, who began to tinkle the keys softly. She climbed down delicately from the ladder and came back to the edge of the stage, leaning over to speak to the men who were closest. There was a gasp at the sight.

“You, sir. You in the brown cap. What’s your name?”

“Archie, miss.”

The man was short and wiry with a rather grubby face, as if he never quite got it clean.

“And what’s your trade, Charlie?”

He shuffled his feet and looked embarrassed.

“He’s a honey man,” yelled his companion. There were cries from those beside him who ostentatiously swayed away.

Annie stepped back. “Oh dear! An honest trade if ever I heard of one, but a little too sweet for me I’m afraid.”

She surveyed the men pressing in front of her.

“Me! Me!” They were thrusting their hands in the air like boys in a classroom. Annie pointed to one of them who was wearing a beige linen suit that looked as if he’d got it from a secondhand clothes shop on Queen Street. But he had wide shoulders, and even under the too-big coat he looked strong.

“You’re a real swell. What do you do?”

He stammered. “I’m a logger, miss.”

“My, that’s grand. But I don’t know if I can ever trust a logging man again.”

“Why is that, Annie?” bellowed a tough in the front row.

She pouted. “It was a logging man as ruined my sister.”

“Oh no!”

She began to prance back and forth as she told the story.

“My sister is a dear, dear girl, soft-hearted as...sh...well, let’s say very soft-hearted. One day this logging man came to her. He was very low.” Lots of titters. “His mood, I mean, you naughty men. He told her he was in danger of losing his crib. ‘Oh dear,’ says she, foolish girl. ‘Is there anything I can do to help?’ ‘There is that,’ says Charlie. ‘You see, a logging man has to be real handy with his hook. He’s got to get those logs unjammed and sometimes they are sooo tight, you just can’t get your bill in no how-’” Huge guffaws. Annie acted bewildered. “I don’t know what’s so funny about that!

Let me go on with my story. 'All I need is a little practice,' says he, so my sister, who has too many soft things about her, heart, head, and-well, never mind that. Anyway, she helped that logging man practice all summer with that long, long, long hook of his. But then you know what?"

"What, Annie?" they yelled in unison.

"When winter came *he* was completely cured of his problem and happily he trotted off to go back to his crib... and now *my sister has a problem*."

Roars of laughter. Rather guiltily, Murdoch found himself smiling too.

Annie held out her hand.

"I hope I can trust you, Charlie. And don't forget I'm wearing my new boots."

She lifted her skirt so they could see. More hollers and hoots. Murdoch was pressed against the stage. The heat was overwhelming and he was sweating. The smell from the bodies jammed against him was rank.

The piano player began to thump out another song.

"I had a sweet little dickie bird..."

The lumberjack clambered on the stage and took Annie clumsily in his arms. They did a waltz around the stage, the logger moving his arm up and down as if he was at the pump. She only tolerated it for two rounds then she let go and led him back to the stairs.

"That was lovely," she said with a grimace, rubbing her arm. "Got the blood flowing. Who's next?"

Murdoch didn't wait. Boldly, he shoved the honey man away from him and vaulted onto the stage. The others shouted disparaging comments. He ignored them and bowed politely to Annie. She curtsied back and Murdoch held up his arms in dance position just as Professor Otranto had taught him.

Annie smiled. "Ha, a dancer I see."

"I sure am," said Murdoch. He didn't add that to date his only partner had been his teacher, who took the woman's

part. His first real dance was coming up next week.

Graciously, Annie stepped up to him. This close he could see how painted her face was, the complexion unnaturally smooth and white, the cheeks and lips rouged. She placed one hand on his shoulder and the other in his. She smiled up at him but it was an impersonal professional smile. He smelled a waft of violet on her breath. As did the good professor, she favoured breath cachous. Her eyes were unnaturally shiny, and as she readied herself he could detect a slight unsteadiness to her stance. She's as close to being full as you can get without falling over, he thought.

The piano player started again, the audience joining in.

*"I had a sweet little dickie bird,
Tweet, tweet tweet, he went..."*

The bobbing red feather pinned in her hair was brushing his nose. They started to waltz, Murdoch trying to pay attention both to her and to his feet. He was counting in his head. One, two, three; one, two, three.

"What do you do when you're not dancing, Charlie?"

He executed a tricky cross-step. She followed easily.

"I'm a police officer. Acting Detective William Murdoch."

The bodice beneath his hand was stiff and unyielding, but even so he felt the sudden tightening of her back. There was a flash of fear across her eyes but the smile replaced it immediately.

"I hope you're not here officially, Mr. Murdoch."

"Tweet, tweet, tweet, he went..."

"As a matter of fact I am. I'd like to have a talk with you."

At that point the harmony between them broke down and he tripped over her feet. She dropped her arms and cried out, making a big to-do of hobbling away.

“Get off the stage, go on, you ox.” The men were yelling at him, waving fists; some in good drunken earnest.

The thought flashed through Murdoch’s mind that he’d aroused their jealousy with his smooth reverse turn. He stood his ground, although out of the corner of his eye he could see the manager was at the steps ready to move in. He went closer to Annie.

“When?” he asked.

She pirouetted. “After closing time, in my dressing room.”

Shirtsleeves was on stage and coming fast towards him. Murdoch jumped down of his own accord.

Annie had called up another dancer, a well-dressed man with dark hair and a sun-tanned, weather-beaten skin. In time to more tweeting they waltzed around the stage and Murdoch was glad to see that the newcomer was no champion. He obviously knew the right steps but he moved so stiffly he could have been a mechanical piece. However, Annie smiled up at him and although Murdoch knew quite well it was all part of the act, he felt a twinge of jealousy.

Leaving them to it, he forced his way through the hot bodies back to the door and finally got outside. Here the air was blessedly cool and he leaned against the wall and wiped his dripping face and neck with his handkerchief. His hand smelled faintly perfumed from Annie’s glove and he shifted uncomfortably at the remembered image of all that white, bouncing flesh so close to him.

CHAPTER TWELVE



Murdoch returned to the station to check the street directory for the Pedlow address and to see what sort of state Crabtree was in. He found the constable in the stable yard. Number-four station possessed two horses, both elderly and reliable, who were used to pull the police ambulance. At the moment, both were in harness. The traces, however, were not hitched to the wagon but to the large frame of George Crabtree. Two of the young constables, Burney and Duncan, were observing, both as alert as seconds in a prize fighter's corner.

Crabtree was stripped down to his singlet and cotton drawers and the reins were wrapped around his thick forearms. He saw Murdoch but was too intent on his task to acknowledge him.

"Ready," he called to Burney.

The constable grasped both bridles, clicked his tongue, and started to lead the horses forward. Crabtree dug into the dirt of the yard with his cleated boots and leaned back. The horses stopped.

"Come on, you. Thut, thut," clucked Burney, and both horses, a bay gelding and a black mare, thrust their muscular shoulders into their collars and took a couple of steps forward. Crabtree yielded some ground but quickly braced himself again and the horses halted.

Again Burney urged them on. Crabtree's body was sharply angled backward, his massive legs pushing into the ground as he tried to hold the pull. The veins in his forehead and neck were so prominent Murdoch was afraid they might

burst open. The constable was drenched in sweat and now so low to the ground that his buttocks were inches from touching it. The horses stopped, Captain pawing the ground and tossing his head in bewilderment. For a moment they held, man and beast immobile, but at Burney's shout, the horse moved forward and Crabtree couldn't hold any longer. He started to slide, scrambling desperately to gain a foothold, giving little hops to try to get the dig in. Captain was not to be gainsaid, however, and dragged him on, as Crabtree's boots scraped deep grooves in the dirt.

"Whoa! Whoa!"

Burney halted his charges and they snorted and swished their tails in triumph.

Crabtree collapsed onto his back and Duncan picked up the bucket of water that was in readiness and doused him. Spluttering and shaking his head, the big man sat up. Murdoch went over to him.

"What the hell are you doing?"

"Practicing for the pull, sir," gasped the constable.

"Hardly a fair match is it?"

"I don't know, I suppose not."

"For the horses, I mean. Here, let me give you a hand up. Do you want some more water?"

"Thank you, sir."

Murdoch nodded at the other constable who came over with another bucket. Crabtree drank the water.

"Whose idea was this?" Murdoch asked, although he suspected he knew the answer.

"Inspector Brackenreid's. He says the Greeks used to train this way."

"But you've been under the weather. Maybe you're overdoing it."

"I'm not so bad, sir."

He started to wipe himself down with the piece of clean sacking his assistant had handed him.

"Maybe I should be having a look at your teeth," said Murdoch.

"Sir?"

"Never mind. Look, if you're feeling up to it, I'd like you to get over to River Street and help Wiggin with the interviews. The man is as useless as a third tit. I'm going to Jarvis Street. I'll tell you about it while you get dressed."

"I'll just congratulate my competitors," said Crabtree and went over to pet the horses.

"You'd better not stroke the grenadiers' noses when you're up against them," Murdoch called to him. "They might misunderstand."

He was just about to give another tug on the bellpull when the door opened. The young footman stared at him and assumed a faintly supercilious expression.

Murdoch presented his card.

"I wish to speak to Mrs. Pedlow, if you please."

The footman read the card. "Acting Detective, number-four station" was printed neatly beneath Murdoch's name. The servant's superior air dropped away like a thin man's drawers. His alarm was palpable.

"Madam is not at home."

"Is that 'not at home' as in out, or 'not at home' as in doesn't want visitors?"

By the question, Murdoch had violated an unspoken rule of etiquette, but he was in no mood for niceties. The footman was completely flustered.

"She's in but not receiving calls today."

"Maybe she'll make an exception in my case. Will you tell her I'm investigating a very serious police matter and I would appreciate the opportunity to speak to her."

The footman stared at him. Murdoch thought his behaviour was odd but people often reacted like that when

they knew who he was. A spotless conscience seemed a rarity.

“Will you step inside, Mr., er, Murdoch? I will see if Mrs. Pedlow is available.”

“And what’s your name, young man? I might need to talk to you as well.”

Murdoch was only partly bluffing. He might indeed have to question the servants. It depended on what Mrs. Pedlow had to say for herself. The footman looked even more ill at ease.

“I’m John Meredith. But what would you want to talk to me about?”

“I don’t exactly know until I’ve had my chat with Mrs. Pedlow.”

Suddenly the footman’s face brightened with relief, like a condemned man who’d got a pardon. “I’ll go fetch her.”

Forgetting all his training, he backed away awkwardly, leaving Murdoch to enter and close the doors behind him.

The entrance hall where he stood was sumptuous and felt vaguely ecclesiastical. A mahogany staircase, the balustrade elaborately carved, swept off to the side. A crystal chandelier, with what looked like electric light, tinkled softly in the sweep of air. Glancing around, he saw why he had been put in mind of a church. To his right was a tall stained-glass window depicting St. George slaying the dragon. The saint was young and muscular in his white armour with the red cross, the dragon green and ferocious. In front of the window was a three-legged table on top of which was an embossed silver salver for visitor’s cards. Curious, Murdoch stirred them with his finger. What was it again? When he was a young man he had studied all the etiquette books he could find, conscious of his own ignorant beginnings. However, maturity and Liza had tempered that anxiety. She had known much more about how to apply the necessary oils to the wheels of polite society. Not that their calls and visits to friends were formal. The opposite really.

More likely to be outings to the lake or a ferry ride to the island than a stiff conversation in the drawing room.

He picked up one of the cards. He remembered now. Mrs. Simon Curzon had turned down the right end of her card, which meant she had come in person. He'd seen her name often in the newspaper, organizing some event or other for the Women's Historical Society. Mrs. Laura Spurr and her daughter Miss Georgiana Spurr had both left cards, folded in the middle to indicate they were calling on all the family. Miss Spurr was an artist. Portraits of Toronto society, if he remembered correctly. Perhaps Mrs. Pedlow was a customer.

His boots had rung out on the hard surface of the hall floor and looking down he saw it was of pink and grey Italian marble. Perfect for dancing. He almost felt like doing a quick jig right on the spot.

However, Meredith came down the stairs and forestalled him. "Mrs. Pedlow will be most happy to receive you," said the footman. "Please to wait in here and she will be with you right away."

He ushered the detective through the tapestry portieres into the drawing room.

Murdoch removed his hat but didn't sit down. He'd started to perspire, partly from a nervousness he despised in himself, and partly because the room was uncomfortably warm. A completely unnecessary fire had been lit in the hearth.

Consistent with the grand entrance hall, this room was spacious and luxurious. The walls were panelled in white wood with an ebony trim, and above the wainscot was flowered paper of crimson flock. More flowers, yellow and red roses, patterned the hunter green carpet, which was thick enough for a dog to bury a bone in. Or a pauper his pittance.

He walked over to the fireplace, which dominated the far wall. An oil painting in a massive gilt-edged oak frame

was hung above the mantel. Murdoch recognized the portrait of Judge Pedlow in his robe of office. It must have been painted fairly recently, because his honour looked older than Murdoch remembered. However, the artist, either through inadequate skills or fundamental honesty, had not softened the harsh line of the jaw or the tightness of the mouth. Pedlow looked just as mean-spirited and severe as he remembered.

Murdoch fingered the calling card he'd put in his pocket. You never knew, maybe a little dirt from this case would rub off on his lordship.

There was a large mechanical piece on a marble stand next to the hearth, and curious, he turned to have a look at it. He'd heard about these things but had never actually seen one before. Inside a glass cover, two monkeys dressed in blue and red satin were seated at a table in a saloon surrounded by mirrors. One held a cigar, the other an ornate box. Presumably when the piece was wound up the monkeys moved and music played.

He was saved from temptation by the entrance of Mrs. Pedlow.

"Mr. Murdoch, I'm sorry if I kept you waiting."

The woman greeting him was younger than he expected, slight of build, with light brown hair curled around her forehead and cheeks in the latest style. The startling thing about her, however, was the lumpy wine-coloured birthmark that covered her right cheek. Her voice was rather haughty, an impression heightened by the slight upward turn of the corner of her lip.

She indicated one of the chairs.

"Do sit down."

She took a chair across from him and at an angle. He could see she was adept at seating herself in such a way the disfigurement of her right cheek was partly obscured. She was handsomely dressed in a cream-coloured satin gown trimmed at the bodice and skirt with narrow bands of

purple. The sleeves were full and puffed at the top, which also masked the naevus. There was as much lace at the neck and cuffs of the sleeves as his bishop wore on holy days. If this was how she dressed when she wasn't receiving, he wondered what her gown was like when she was "at home."

"May I offer some refreshment?"

"No, thank you, ma'am."

Hands clasped tightly in her lap, she waited for him to begin.

"I'm conducting a police investigation, ma'am, and I wonder if I could ask you a few questions?"

"Of course."

"Would you happen to know, or have you ever heard of, a woman named Dolly Shaw? She lived at River Street at the corner of Wilton."

Maud Pedlow managed to indicate slightly offended surprise.

"Not at all, Mr. Murdoch. I cannot imagine why I should."

He took the calling card from his pocket.

"This is yours, I presume, Mrs. Pedlow?"

She took it from him as gingerly as if it would crumble at the touch. "Yes, it is mine. Why do you have it?"

"I found it in Mrs. Shaw's desk."

"How strange. I assure you it is not because I paid her a call."

Mrs. Pedlow spoke as if the notion was utterly absurd, knowing Dolly Shaw to be riff-raff. However, he couldn't make too much of that. Most people of Maud's standing would make the same assumption. The better class of people wouldn't be involved with the police in life or death.

"Is something the matter that you are enquiring? Does it have anything to do with Mr. Pedlow's being a judge?"

"I don't know about that, ma'am. But yes, I'd say there is something very much the matter. The woman was murdered."

Maud jumped at his emphatic tone and her hand flew to her damaged cheek. He waited for questions but none came, and once again he was at a loss to know if this was typical behaviour in polite society or because she already knew the answers.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Murdoch. What you've told me is shocking but I don't see I can be of any help. One of my cards must have come into her possession by chance."

"The dead woman's daughter takes in laundry to wash. Could there be a connection that way? Her name is Lily."

"I don't know her either but it sounds likely she could have picked up my card from somebody's house. One of her customers. Perhaps she was intending to approach me for work."

Maybe, but he wasn't prepared to give up yet. He hesitated, searching for the appropriate words. "I have been told that Mrs. Shaw was once a midwife and that she served women in all aspects of their pregnancy."

She stared at him. "I see. Are you suggesting one of my servants might be, er, involved?"

He shrugged.

"It is highly unlikely," she continued quickly. "None of them have given any, er, sign. His lordship has very high standards of behaviour, thinking that any immorality in his own household would reflect adversely on his position and example."

"And rightly so, ma'am."

He had to admit she'd shifted the focus most adroitly but whether that was from cunning or the arrogance of her class, he couldn't tell. He was aware this woman was uncomfortable and nervous and did not want to appear so.

"Would anybody have received a letter from Mrs. Shaw?"

"No."

"You are speaking for yourself, I assume, ma'am?"

"Yes, of course, but the servants do not receive mail. Burns would tell me if they did."

"Do you know a Miss Brogan, ma'am? Miss Annie Brogan. She is an entertainer. An internationally acclaimed chanteuse."

"No, I don't." She paused and her eyes met his. "Is she implicated?"

"I've not come to any conclusions yet, ma'am. I'm just following up every possibility."

There was a silence and he waited until her attention returned to him.

"I'm sorry I couldn't help more. Now if you will excuse me...we will be serving tea shortly. My husband likes us to be punctual."

"I would like to speak with your servants, if you please, ma'am."

"Is that necessary? How could they know any more than I?"

"As you have implied, ma'am, a woman like Dolly Shaw would be more likely to associate with your servants than with yourself."

"I do think you are carrying your zeal too far, Mr. Murdoch. I don't want the servants disturbed. I have two young maids. Who knows if this will throw them into hysterics."

"I shall be most tactful and I must remind you I am investigating the most serious of crimes. A woman murdered in her own home. Come now, Mrs. Pedlow. You are married to a judge. You must value the law, surely? Besides I doubt your maids will take a conniption over some poor old woman they've never heard of. And if they are as pure as you say, the other thing will not trouble them. I'm afraid I have to insist, ma'am."

Before she could answer, there was a soft tap at the door and the butler entered.

"Shall I prepare tea soon, madam?"

"Thank you, Burns."

Murdoch got to his feet. "Your permission, ma'am?"

Not looking at him, she said, "I don't seem to have much choice in the matter." She turned to the butler.

"Burns, will you take Mr. Murdoch to the kitchen and fetch in the servants. He is a detective. He would like to talk to everybody."

The butler's eyes flickered over to Murdoch. He tried to act as impassively as if she'd been talking about introducing the new rector but he didn't quite succeed.

"What does it have to do with us here, if I may be so bold as to ask, madam?"

"I'll explain all that," said Murdoch.

"You'd better start with Susan," said Mrs. Pedlow.

"Where is she?"

"She's turning out the upper bedrooms, madam."

"Go and get her will you? I'll direct Mr. Murdoch to the kitchen."

Burns left, his curiosity hovering on the air like a smell. Maud turned back to Murdoch.

"Did you say that there is a young woman involved? A singer?"

"I don't yet know how involved she is, but we have a witness who claims Miss Brogan entered Mrs. Shaw's house late on the night of the murder."

"A witness?"

"A neighbour. He suffers from insomnia and he was at his window."

Mrs. Pedlow stood up and walked over to the mechanical piece. Her back was to Murdoch. "I forgot. That is, I didn't realize until this moment, but there was a young woman who came here. Now that I recall she said her name was Brogan. That was the name you mentioned, was it not?"

"Yes, ma'am. Annie Brogan."

"My footman has apparently seduced her sister and got her with child, so she came here to confront him."

Murdoch hadn't expected this.

"What day was this, ma'am?"

"The Friday last."

"Did you talk with her yourself?"

"Very briefly. My ward and I were on our way out when we encountered her and her sister on the doorstep."

"And you hadn't seen her before?"

"She was a total stranger to me."

"Have you seen her since?"

Maud started to wind up the mechanical apparatus.

"Now that you ask, she did in fact return on Saturday. I almost forgot. She wanted me to help her. See that Meredith did the right thing. Of course I will do my best. But perhaps this isn't the woman you are seeking."

"Did she mention where she worked? Where she did her singing?"

"No, she didn't. As I said it was the briefest of visits. We merely discussed what to do about her sister's situation."

Murdoch nodded. "I'll talk to the servants now then, ma'am. If you'll be so good as to show me the way."

The monkeys started to move. The cigar smoker raised the cigar to his lips, the other monkey opened his box and took out dice. A lively piece of music accompanied this action. Murdoch was glad he'd seen the thing in operation, and he looked forward to telling Arthur and Beatrice all about it.

The kitchen was filled with the necessities for maintaining a rich household. There were three tall pine cupboards along the far wall, and an enormous gleaming Sunshine range squatted opposite. Iron pots and pans hung from a grid suspended from the ceiling. There was even an icebox tucked in the corner. A short, grey-haired woman was chopping vegetables at a table by the stove. At first Murdoch thought she was bald, but closer he saw that she

had pulled back her grey hair so tightly from her pinched face, that the shape of her skull was prominent. Burns introduced her as his wife, Hannah.

“Detective Murdoch is here to investigate a murder, my dear.” The woman looked up at Murdoch, her eyes streaming with tears. For a split second he didn’t know what on earth was the matter, then the corresponding sting in his own eyes made him realize she was chopping onions. She sniffed hard and wiped her runny nose with the back of her hand. Burns went on to summarize what Murdoch had told him. Hannah was unimpressed. No, she had never heard of Dolly Shaw or Annie Brogan. She kept to herself, thank you, like any Christian woman should. They did their own washing, even had an electric tumbler, she said with as much pride as if it were her own. As to the story about Meredith and Annie Brogan’s visit, it didn’t surprise her at all. Actresses were no better than women of the night as far as she was concerned. Murdoch didn’t bother to correct her that it was Annie’s sister who was in the family way. Mrs. Burns had hardly got all this off her chest, which was as tight as her hair, when there was a high-pitched whistling sound from the direction of the door. Burns went over immediately and Murdoch saw a row of small bells, each with a label above them. To one side was a curved tube. The butler pulled off a little lid and put his ear against the end of the tube. He listened for a few moments then he shouted into the opening.

“Yes, madam, right away.”

His wife looked up at him questioningly.

“She wants the carriage brought out. Says she has to go on an errand.”

“That’s awkward. Taylor’s mending the tack and he’s got to get his lordship from the courthouse by four. She specifically said she wouldn’t want the carriage today.”

Burns shrugged. “No use telling me that. She’s changed her mind and she’s in a hurry.” He pushed a button that

presumably connected with the stable. "I thought I'd set Mr. Murdoch up for his investigations in my pantry. Out of everybody's way." He meant out of her way and Murdoch was grateful. He wouldn't have liked to be making his enquiries under the cold stare of Mrs. Burns. The butler had ranked Murdoch to own satisfaction and was much friendlier. He ushered Murdoch over to a small room off the kitchen. It was just big enough to hold a desk and two chairs, one behind and one in front. There was a glass-fronted lawyer's cabinet along the wall stocked with bound registers. Burns seemed to be a tidy man. While he went to fetch the first of the servants, Murdoch took out his notebook and placed it in the middle of the desk. All ready for business.

The questioning took almost two hours, and the most interesting interviews were the ones with John Meredith and Maud's personal maid, Louise Kenny.

Initially, the young footman obviously thought he was going to be charged with seduction but when Murdoch made it clear he wasn't interested in Meredith's love life, he relaxed. No, he didn't know any Dolly Shaw but he did admit to knowing Annie Brogan, in a manner of speaking. With more bravado than shame he narrated to Murdoch his encounter with the two sisters on Friday.

"You could have tipped my arse with a goose feather when they appeared like that. I mean I didn't know Millie had got one on the go. Terrible shock it was and the three of us dithering on the doorstep like tarts at the church door. Then out comes the mistress." He paused and eyed Murdoch shrewdly. "That was very odd, I tell you. You'd think Annie and her knew each other but weren't having on they did. But God knows where they would have met, given who she is."

"I take it Annie Brogan is who you are referring to?"

"Course. Anyways, she is a bold one, that doxie. Before you could wink, she'd asked mistress if she could take Miss Sarah down to the opera house. Show her around! And the

missus said yes, sweet as you please. Come for tea and we'll discuss it, like she was a proper person."

Murdoch frowned. That wasn't what Mrs. Pedlow had told him at all.

"Did you see Miss Brogan when she came on Saturday?"

"Not really. She and missus met in the gazebo out in the garden." He leaned forward and placed his forefinger on his nose. "I was polishing the brasses at the time but I tell you man to man, I considered it in my best interests to keep an eye on the proceedings so I peeked out the window. I tell you they were thick as flies on offal."

"How long did she stay?"

"Quite a long time."

"How long? Twenty minutes? An hour?"

"A good forty minutes, I'd say."

So much for Maud's "briefest of visits," or maybe she had a different concept of time from most people.

He changed tack. "Who fetches the mail?"

"I do."

Murdoch took out the letter he'd found in Dolly's desk. He folded the bottom so Meredith could see only the first line of writing. No sense in getting rumours started.

"Ever see a letter with this handwriting?"

Meredith shook his head. "Never. Most of what comes is legal sort of things for his honour."

"You're certain?"

"Sure as houses. I'd remember."

Like most servants, Meredith took a lively interest in his employer's affairs.

"Has anything been hand-delivered?"

"When?"

"I don't know," Murdoch replied irritably. "Anytime. Recently. Last year."

"Not that I recall. I've been here for five years. I see everybody that comes to the door. If they're trades and they brought anything, Mrs. Burns would let me know. I take it in

to madam or his honour. I'd remember. I've got a good memory."

"Too bad you didn't remember you already had a fiancée when you seduced Mildred Brogan."

The footman was unabashed. Murdoch could read his mind. He thought the detective was speaking out of jealousy. "She was willing. Eager, if you want to know."

"I don't. So what are you going to do? The decent thing?"

Meredith looked sullen. "Can't, can I? Ellen's father has a nice dry goods store on King Street, and the idea is that he'll take me into the business when we're married. How can I pass that up?"

"How indeed? Maybe you should have thought of that before you put one in the oven."

That deflated Meredith sufficiently to give Murdoch some satisfaction and he dismissed him.

The scullery maid and the general servant were sisters, Mary and Susan Davis. Murdoch interviewed them together to guard against hysterics. However, they were two sturdy young women, both with the fresh colour and firm flesh of country girls. The older one, Susan, expressed sympathy for the dead woman which nobody else had done. They knew nothing, had not met her or Lily or seen the Brogans when they arrived. Monday was washing day but it had rained so they'd had to do the laundry on Friday, and both of them had spent the entire day in the downstairs scullery. The only nervousness they exhibited was that they might be blamed for something, they knew not what. Mr. Burns was swift with his deductions, said Susan, and they were trying to support a large tribe of brothers and sisters up in Bradford. They couldn't afford to be docked any wages. Murdoch then told them bluntly about Dolly's illegal services but they weren't too shocked about that either. Susan laughed.

"You don't have to worry about none of the servants getting into trouble in this household. His lordship probably

knows when we use the privy let alone anything else. Nobody is allowed a follower or you get sacked. We should have been nuns. Have a better time."

Murdoch didn't like her last comment but he knew she didn't mean real harm. He showed them the letter but they said they never saw the mail. The trades that came to the back door were handled by Mrs. Burns. Murdoch thanked them and they went off to turn out another bedroom.

The next interview was with Maud's personal maid, Louise Kenny.

She entered in a miasma of patchouli oil which she must have applied recently. A tall woman, rather big-boned, she was definitely not suited to fluttering. However, she had brought a dainty tortoise-shell fan with her and she snapped it open and closed at regular intervals. She was wearing a deep blue satin waist with a high sulphur-yellow collar and matching cuffs. Her skirt was rustle taffeta of a turquoise tint.

She was eager to help but had nothing to contribute, although she tried hard. Every time Murdoch asked a question she opened her fan, waved it vigorously while she gave the matter the serious consideration it deserved, then snapped it shut to answer. Unfortunately, she did not know anybody by the name of Dolly Shaw, although she had known a Doris Shawcross who had passed away three years ago. No, she had no acquaintance with Annie Brogan and was not aware she had visited Mrs. Pedlow on Saturday afternoon. Madam had not mentioned she was having callers. She, Miss Kenny, had been upstairs tending to the mistress's gowns the whole day.

"She only buys the absolute best, imported for the most part from Paris, France, so we do have to take very good care of them."

Murdoch had the feeling that Miss Kenny wanted to tell him something but didn't know how to get started. He decided to let loose a lure and see what happened.

"If I may say so, Miss Kenny, I feel sorry for the lady. She would be a handsome woman except for the..."

He waved his hand over his cheek.

Miss Kenny sighed. "That is so true. And money won't compensate, will it?"

He shook his head soberly. "Fortunately she has her little ward. Children don't notice these defects, do they?"

"Not when they're young, but the child remarked on it the other day. 'Can you scrub it off, Auntie?' she asks her. I could see that the mistress was upset, but she didn't give the child any reprimand as she probably should have. But then she never does. It's murder for the nursemaids, I can tell you. They can't offer one correction or scold to that girl or they'll be sacked on the spot. Fortunately for all of us, Miss Sarah is a sweet-natured child and not difficult to manage."

"How long have you been in Mrs. Pedlow's employ?"

"Seven and one half years. She had just returned from England. The poor little orphan was barely six months old at the time." She tilted her head, speaking confidentially. "Her own mother was Mrs. Pedlow's cousin and died in childbirth. The husband had already been taken off by the influenza. What a tragedy. His lordship wasn't overjoyed at the idea of a ward, but he couldn't do much with the infant on the doorstep, could he?"

Murdoch bent towards her. He could see that Miss Kenny used face powder on her rather broad nose, and Nature could not have tinted her cheeks with such an even blush.

"Between you and me, Miss Kenny, I am sometimes at a loss as to why certain folks ever get married. His lordship and Mrs. Pedlow seem as different as chalk and cheese."

She smiled. "How right you are. But perhaps for her..." Like Murdoch she fluttered her hand in the area of her right cheek. "I would never do that, myself. My mother always said I was as particular as a princess because I turned down suitor after suitor."

"Perhaps that was not such a good comparison. The royal princesses don't really have much choice in husbands, do they?"

She looked at him, trying to determine the intent of his comment. "I suppose not."

He had meant nothing by the remark but he had hurt her feelings in some obscure way he couldn't quite fathom. "As you were saying, Miss Kenny?"

"Just that I was a foolish girl and thought youth would last forever. I am much mellowed now, having seen too much of life to expect perfection. Even Lord Byron had his faults."

Murdoch wasn't entirely sure who the imperfect lord was but there was no mistaking the wistfulness in Miss Kenny's voice. She was in the market for a husband. He sat back abruptly in his chair. She was affected, plain, and in his opinion had a terrible taste in clothes, but there was something about her that moved him. Perhaps because he could sense her aching loneliness and that he understood.

He considered briefly, then he said, "I have no desire to place you in an untenable position but I am interested in your opinion. I tell you frankly that your mistress has not been absolutely candid with me. Not big things as far as I can determine, but me being the suspicious man that I am, I'm always bothered if I'm handed even small lies."

"Such as?"

"The young woman I mentioned, Annie Brogan, came here to call on Saturday and stayed for almost an hour. Mrs. Pedlow at first denied all knowledge of the girl but when it became apparent I would find out, she pretended it was the most brief and casual of visits. John Meredith felt there was something odd about the meeting between Miss Brogan and Mrs. Pedlow. He wondered if they had met before."

"I'd swear not while I've been in Mrs. Pedlow's service."

"She strikes me as a highly strung woman. What is your impression, Miss Kenny? Is there anything distressing her?"

Murdoch knew he was taking a risk, that Louise Kenny might be affronted in her loyalties to her mistress. She stared at him for a moment then put the fan at rest in her lap.

"In my opinion she was upset when Mr. Henry Pedlow, his lordship's nephew, showed up from India. Nobody expected him. In he waltzes as if he'd just come back from a swim at Sunnyside. I don't think she can abide the man. She's so flustered and jumpy whenever he's around."

"Is that all that's bothering her? An unwelcome visitor?"

"Nothing else untoward has happened."

"Is her marriage happy would you say?"

"As much as possible—"

"Given her husband is Walter Pedlow?"

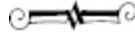
She nodded, snapping the fan open and wafting it vigorously.

"Miss Kenny, might I ask you for a favour?"

"If I can."

He lowered his voice and explained what he wanted.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN



Annie's dressing room was even smaller than Murdoch's own cubicle at the station. There was room for a shabby dresser, an extra cane chair, and a sagging pouf. Across one corner was strung a peacock blue chenille curtain. The tiny space was bare of clutter but from the rather lumpy hang of the curtain, Murdoch had the sense that things had been hastily stuffed away for his benefit. Annie hadn't changed out of her stage costume but she'd covered her bosom with a grey, honeycomb shawl which she might have borrowed from her granny. She'd also removed the makeup from her face. Except for the spangled scarlet skirt that showed beneath the shawl, she looked neat and proper. She did not want to give offence.

"Please sit down. That chair isn't as fragile as it looks."

He took the cane chair, which swayed and creaked alarmingly.

"What can I do for you, Mr., er, I'm sorry but I've forgotten your name already."

"It isn't Charlie."

She shrugged. "There's too many of them to remember. Charlie suits."

"My name's Murdoch. William Murdoch."

"And you're a police officer?"

She wrinkled her forehead prettily as if the idea of police officers was bewildering.

"That's right. Acting detective, number-four station."

She turned to face the dresser mirror and absent-mindedly smoothed her hair back into one of her combs.

She continued to look at his reflection and he was forced to address her the same way.

"I'm conducting an investigation and I thought you might be able to help."

"If I can, of course. I like to be of help."

Somehow she managed to make it sound lascivious.

"Did you by any chance know a Mrs. Shaw? Dolly Shaw? She lived on River Street."

Annie's eyes narrowed and she became still. "Never heard of her. Why d'you ask?"

"She's dead."

She swivelled around and met his gaze properly.

"What! When'd that happen?"

"She was found stone cold dead in her own parlour last Friday morning."

Annie stared at him and gave a little laugh.

"Come on, Mr. Murdoch, spit it out. What happened, for God's sake?"

"The coroner says she was suffocated."

"Suffocated how?"

"I'm not at liberty to disclose the method of death, ma'am. But I can tell you it was not from natural causes."

She picked up the ostrich feather fan from the dresser and began to fan herself. She did it more gracefully than Miss Louise Kenny but for similar reasons.

"If it wasn't natural then it was unnatural. In my book, that means somebody done her in. Is that right?"

"It is."

"Why've you come here? What's it to do with me?"

"One of the neighbours was looking out his window late on Thursday night. Fellow couldn't sleep. He says he saw a young woman enter Mrs. Shaw's house. At about a quarter past midnight. He says that woman was you, Miss Brogan."

"That's a load of horse plop. I told you I've never heard of the woman. He's got the wrong person. How can you

believe some old gasper who's sitting there pulling on his dick 'til he goes blind?"

"Stow the language. Mr. Golding says he recognized you because you'd had a little encounter the week previous. When you were coming into the Derby here. He was outside preaching Temperance."

"What sort of frigging encounter?"

"He says you knocked over a Miss Yielding who was his assistant."

Annie grinned suddenly. "I remember the man now. Ugly as a devil's dick. Got all these lumps all over him. That's the one, isn't it?"

Murdoch nodded.

"He's trying to get back at me. I didn't push the stupid hummer over. She slipped. She wanted to stick a tract up my nose and I was startled. It wasn't my fault. He's making up this story to get me in trouble, the prick."

"I asked you to watch your language."

She sneered. "Sorry, I didn't realize I was in the presence of unstained youth."

"Can you prove where you were then? Last Thursday night, say from ten to morning."

"I was at home in my bed, where else? Fast asleep."

"Do you live by yourself?"

"'Course not. My sister Millie and me doss down on Mill Street."

"She could confirm that you were at home?"

"Of course. But believe me, that's where I was, not murdering some bint on River Street."

"Do you know anybody by the name of Pedlow, Mrs. Maud Pedlow?"

"No."

"That's odd. She says you went to visit her on Saturday."

"I did?"

"You did. And don't tell me she's lying because the footman also says you were there."

"Does he now? Well maybe he's having it off with his missus and agrees to anything she says."

Murdoch felt like shaking her. "Listen to me, Annie Brogan. All I have to do is take you to the station and bring them in. Of course they'll identify you. Stop giving me a lot of queer."

"It's not me, it's you. You come in here, throwing your weight around. I visit lots of people. Why are you asking me about this particular bint?"

He almost laughed. "All right, fair enough. When I was examining Dolly Shaw's desk I found Mrs. Pedlow's calling card. I went to question said lady just in case and discovered you'd been there previously. I thought it was quite a coincidence seeing as how you seemed to be connected with the murder victim."

"Friggin hell," Annie exploded. "I just told you that's horse plop, dog pure, bull patties, whatever you want to call it. Or shall I just say shit? That is shit."

"Cut it out, I said. You asked me why I wanted to know about you and Mrs. Pedlow and I'm telling you."

Annie, her eyes angry and fearful, turned back to her mirror and began to rub large patches of rouge on her cheeks.

"So did she know anything, the judge's wife?"

"Just like you, she'd never heard of Dolly Shaw."

Suddenly Annie snapped her fingers and in a totally unconvincing display she said, "I know who you mean now. I was getting confused. Didn't really know her name. Pedlow, that's it. I did go to see her. It's true. Saturday."

"Why did you do that?"

"Do I have to tell you?"

"I've already said I'm investigating a murder case. Do you want me to issue a subpoena?"

She continued to paint her face. Dipping her little finger into a small pot on the dresser, she applied a blue paste to her eyelids.

"I've had enough of those things, thank you. It's just that it doesn't involve me so much as my sister, and she has a right to privacy, doesn't she?"

"I know about her pregnancy if that's what you're referring to."

She squeezed some black paint out of a tube on to a dainty brush. "Meredith told you?"

Murdoch nodded.

"The man got his tool into my sister and she's got one on the go. He says he can't marry her, that he's betrothed to some other poor woman. I've always looked after my sister and I thought the mistress of the house might help us to make Mr. Merry Dick see the error of his ways."

"And will she?"

"She says so. Very kind lady. She's going to look out for a position for both of them. After they're married."

"Meredith thought you and Mrs. Pedlow were very chummy."

"Did he?" She applied a thick black line on her lower lid and began to draw in lashes. "Well we're all sisters under the skin, aren't we. Like I said, she's a kind lady. She sympathized with my situation. Talking about men draws women closer. We got along like bees on shit."

"Dolly Shaw was in possession of some herbs that will bring on a miscarriage."

His attempt to unsettle her didn't work.

She was reddening her full lips now, in complete control.

"As far as I'm concerned, it's a good thing somebody will help women when they need it. Prevents a lot of misery."

"Maybe you went to River Street to get something to bring on your sister."

"I already told you I didn't." She tapped on his notebook with a long fingernail. "You'd better write it down. You keep

forgetting.”

He was getting nowhere and he was so exasperated he knew it could affect his judgement. It was not out of the question that Golding had made up the story, but he hadn't seemed like a vindictive man. However, he'd already made one assumption that was wrong. He didn't want to make the same mistake with Annie Brogan.

“Give me your exact address, I'm going to have to speak to your sister.”

There was a sharp rap on the door.

“Visitor, Annie!”

“Just a minute.”

“I live at number two-forty-seven, Mill Street, right across from the distillery. Nice down there, smells good. Will you leave now? You've got your answer. People who come here aren't that partial to police officers. I don't want to frighten them off, do I?”

Murdoch entered the information in his notebook, picked up his hat, and squeezed past Annie to the door. As he did so, she untied the demure shawl, letting it fall so that her breasts swelled into view. She watched for his reaction in the mirror and smiled in satisfaction when she caught the unavoidable glance.

When he stepped out into the hall, a young man was leaning against the wall, waiting. It was the long-haired dandy who had got up to dance with Annie earlier. He did not respond to Murdoch's acknowledgement. Morose fellow. He and Annie Brogan deserved each other.

He went directly to Mill Street and, as he expected, a frightened Millie Brogan confirmed her sister's alibi. He could get no other information and she cried so easily and so constantly, he left as soon as he could.

It was a fair hike from there back up to Jarvis Street and Louise Kenny was already waiting for him outside Saltley. As

soon as she saw him approaching she hurried towards him. She had changed her clothes and at first he didn't know why she looked so odd. Then he realized she was wearing a dress that was more suitable for winter and seemed far too small for her. It was a woollen walking costume, dark green with wide lapels of brown satin and an abundance of gold trimming along the seams. Her wrists protruded out of the sleeves, her yellow kid gloves didn't suit.

She indicated the house behind her. "Can we walk a little?" She was quite excited and, far from feeling guilty, she was obviously enjoying the role of informer. He offered her his arm and sedately they proceeded up Jarvis Street. Her hat was so wide and loaded with artificial fruit and flowers that he wondered she could even hold her head up. It meant he had to keep his distance or risk blinding from one of the stems.

"Mr. Murdoch, I only can spare twenty minutes at the most."

"Mrs. Pedlow is back then?"

"Yes. She was out for about an hour."

"And?"

"I asked Taylor as you requested and he said she went to the Avonmore Hotel. That's where Henry Pedlow is staying."

"You thought Mrs. Pedlow didn't like her nephew but she seems most eager to see him, upsetting everybody's plans like that."

"Most peculiar, isn't it? Taylor was ticked off because the horse has been a bit lame and Mrs. Pedlow insisted on going at a canter all the way to the hotel. As if they were going to a fire."

Or from one, thought Murdoch.

"She has been quite out of sorts since she returned. She has requested dinner to be served in her own sitting room and she doesn't even want to be with Miss Sarah."

"Did Taylor know why? What happened?"

Louise frowned. "Taylor is interested only in horses, Mr. Murdoch. Or whether or not the carriage has a squeak. His own mother could be sitting in front of him in a state of suicidal melancholy and he wouldn't notice."

Her voice was sharp and Murdoch wondered if the oblivious coachman had previously stirred Miss Kenny's affections.

"Is she in some sort of trouble?" she asked.

"Frankly, I don't know."

"I must say, I hope not. She is not a warm woman but she can be generous. She gives me her gowns when she no longer needs them."

"Is that one of them?"

"Yes. I had to alter it a little but it is imported from New York, in America, and there is not another one like it in all of Toronto."

"Most becoming, if I may say so, Miss Kenny."

She flushed and looked so happy he felt like a rat. He was acting as self-serving as any masquerader and it wasn't fair.

"One more thing, Miss Kenny." He took the calling card out of his pocket and showed it to her. "This does belong to Mrs. Pedlow, does it not?"

She studied the card briefly. "In a manner of speaking. She has much more fashionable cards now. Narrower, with a more flowing print. I haven't seen this style before."

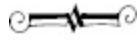
"Thank you. You have been invaluable."

It was time to turn around and take her back. At the gate, she offered him her hand to shake.

"If I can be of further assistance, please don't hesitate to contact me. I will be most discreet."

Her expression was so wistful, he almost wished he had another task for her.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN



Lily lay watching the sky through the trees. She had been lying like this for a long time, until the stars disappeared and the branches came into relief against the coming dawn. When she was in jail, she had spent most of her time watching the window. All she could see was a patch of sky, all that happened was the changing of the light. She concentrated on that until she fell into a trancelike state that was warm and safe. She would go there and not stir until the matron shook her roughly awake and indicated it was time for the next meal. Everybody treated her as if she were simple, even the other inmates. Some of them truly were simple and others were insane. Most of them, however, were poor women who committed crimes out of desperate need. A few of these had made a living as prostitutes and they were treated the worst.

Lily knew what she had done was so bad even these outcasts shunned her, and in the lonely five years of her imprisonment she made friends with no one.

Stiffly, she crawled out of the den. Her side ached from the hard ground and as best as she could she stretched underneath the branches of the willow. The river was fretting against the fallen tree as if it wanted to move it out of the way. Lily reached over, scooped up some water, and poured it over her forehead. And again, and once again. When she was a young girl, she had watched a christening in the village church. The priest had made those gestures over the newborn infant. The baby hadn't cried at all, a good sign, and the parents and grandparents gathered

around the font seemed joyous. The baby was bathed in their delight and welcome.

When Lily had taken the other baby, she had baptized it with water in the same way, needing to participate in such a ritual.

One of the girls in her mother's care had given birth to a deformed child. It had a gaping maw where a mouth should be and the tiny fingers were webbed together. The girl, horrified, had thrust it away from her, refused to tend to it, and Lily understood that the child would be left to die. The next night, driven to desperation by the infant's weakening cries, she took the poor creature out of its cradle and escaped to the woods. She knew of a crude shelter, and after placing the baby on a bed of moss and grass, she went in search of food. She managed to get milk from the Parkers' cow, which was standing in a nearby field, and painstakingly she dribbled the rich cream into the infant's mouth. At first the baby, a girl child, seemed happier, nestling into her bosom, sucking as best as she could at the twist of clean linen that Lily had fashioned for a teat. However, she soon became weaker and weaker and was unable to retain the smallest amount of nourishment, finally not even water from the stream. She didn't cry or fuss, simply lay quietly in Lily's arms. She died there on the fourth day. Lily saw the moment of death, saw the frail breath stop, but she held the tiny body close until the child was grey and cold.

That is how the policeman and the searchers found her. In the doorway of a falling-down hut in the middle of the woods. She refused to give up the dead infant until, in exasperation, the officer clouted her across the head and she had to let go.

The father of the young woman who had given birth was a prosperous merchant and he was only too happy to divert his wrath from his daughter to Lily. The coroner later said that the baby had been born with incomplete digestive

organs and would not have lived. Perhaps Lily even prolonged its life. Nevertheless the law, urged on by the righteous anger of the man of commerce, would not tolerate what was essentially kidnapping. Lily was summarily charged and sentenced to five years' imprisonment. "You are lucky to get such a lenient sentence," said her mother and Lily understood her.

The scandal eventually drove them out of the village. Dolly drew fewer and fewer clients and, embittered, made matters worse by drinking too much. She finally moved to Toronto and changed her name. Lily left prison after four years and six months but she was no longer so pliable as she had been. When Dolly's brutality got too much, she fought back like a baited bear until even Dolly kept a wide berth.

Millie Brogan slipped out of bed, rushed into the adjoining kitchen, and vomited yellow bile into the slop pail. And again. There was nothing in her stomach and the vomiting gave no relief. Trying not to groan as she didn't want to wake Annie, she got to her feet. She ladled some water into the bowl and rinsed out her mouth. As she did so, she caught sight of her own reflection in the fly-speckled mirror over the sink. Millie was not vain. You couldn't grow up with a sister like Annie and consider yourself pretty. But she was only twenty-three years old and she looked forty. Her eyes were dark and hollowed and her hair was stringy and dull about her face. She could have wept at the sight. Annie's cruel words had stuck in her head. "Why any man would want to have a bit off with you, I don't know."

Is that all it had been? A bit on the side? When she had first seen John at the church meeting, he'd seemed so handsome with his brown eyes that bespoke intelligence and energy, his mouth that seemed to want to turn up at the corners in merriment. He wasn't tall, but straight-backed

and smart in his black serge suit and dashing striped four-in-hand. She was sitting across the aisle from him, and catching her eye, he'd smiled with frank appreciation. That Sunday she was wearing the new fur-felt hat that Annie had given her at Christmas. She'd been doubtful about the blue satin bow but she was glad now she'd given in to Annie's scolding and worn it. She could feel that the cold winter wind had whipped a tint into her normally pale face. She hoped it hadn't done the same to her nose.

In the other room, Annie stirred, muttering unintelligibly to herself, but she didn't wake. Millie wet the edge of the towel and rubbed hard at her cheeks and neck. She had to try to get into work today. She'd been forced to take two days off already this month because she felt so ill. One more and she'd lose the job. But the smell of the fermenting malt made her ill and faint. At first she hadn't eaten anything, hoping that would help. Then one morning, the woman who sat beside her at the long table leaned over and without preamble, but kindly, said, "You should eat something, dear, a crust of dry bread is the best. It always helped me." Milly had blushed, terrified at being found out.

She went over to the cupboard and took down the tin where she'd stashed the heels of bread. She forced herself to nibble on one of them. What was going to become of her? John had been so cold, so angry, when she and Annie had gone to the house. Because Mrs. Pedlow had told him to, he'd brought them into the kitchen and given them each a glass of lemonade. But ungraciously, wanting them gone. They hadn't stayed long. Just time enough for Annie to give him a piece of her mind.

"We'll see you on Sunday," Annie said. "And I expect you to have the banns called right away." Her voice was harsh and contemptuous, which had turned John even more sullen. Seeing that, Millie cringed. She herself wanted only to appease him.

She sat down at the table. Annie's supper plate wasn't washed, and the sight of the caked egg made saliva fill her mouth. She waited, sweating, until the nausea passed. The brown paper bag was still sitting where Annie had left it. What if she took the herbs? Tentatively, she ran her hands over her own breasts. Already they were swollen considerably, and the nipples were tender and sore. She remembered vividly Mrs. Reilly's pregnancies, the discomfort, the constant complaining. Both Millie and Annie had looked after the youngest ones as they came along, but the truth was Millie had often left them to cry untended in the soiled cradle. Annie had been better, almost always, tender and loving.

Millie felt a rush of tears. She knew that without this one under her apron there was no reason for John to marry her and that thought was unbearable. She shifted restlessly in the chair. He'd seemed so much in love at first, showering her with dizzying attention. For a few weeks, he had been content to escort her home after church but then he began to hint this was not enough. One Sunday, she invited him in for tea, knowing Annie was not at home. They were sitting on the rickety couch that was jammed against the wall in the kitchen and he had slid to the floor, buried his face in her lap and with muffled voice had professed his love. He was beside himself with desire, he said. Did she love him in the same way? He thought she did, hoped beyond hope that she did. She couldn't speak, only touch his head as tentatively as if it were a burning coal. He kissed her then, so ardently she felt faint. And filled with joy she had never before known.

The next week, however, he avoided her eye and even though he walked her home, he was remote and unsmiling. She begged him to tell her what was wrong, to forgive her if she had offended him. Reluctantly, he told her. He was going mad with desire. He could neither eat nor sleep. If she loved him, she would show her love and give herself to him

as a wife, in God's eyes if not the world's. Otherwise, he said with a sigh, he could not bear the pain a moment longer and he would be forced to break off their friendship. Sick with fear, she had agreed and, that very day, invited him into the shabby bedroom. Once there, she succumbed and was overcome with shame as her own ardour and yearning swept away through her body. He had liked that, he said, liked her passion. However, after they'd had connections four or five times, he confessed he was promised to someone else. He didn't love the other woman, a family promise, but he had to honour it. He had wept, caressing her until she was on fire and again and again she capitulated.

"Changed your mind?"

Annie had got out of bed and was standing in the doorway. Her face was puffy, her hair dishevelled, and even from here Millie could smell the reek of wine on her breath. But for once Annie's expression was soft and loving. Millie reached up her arms as if she were a child.

"Oh, Annie, I'm so afraid."

Her sister came over to her and pulled her close.

"Hush now. Don't cry any more, little Sissie. I'll take care of things."

"How can you?" Millie sobbed.

"Shh. Shh. It will be all right, I promise. I haven't failed you yet, have I?"

Millie pressed against the soft, familiar breasts. She didn't want to acknowledge the strain and worry in Annie's face. She just wanted to feel safe again.

Freddie was trying not to touch George's body. The older boy had threatened him with dreadful retribution if he did. Or if he pissed in the bed. Freddie couldn't help that when it happened in the night, and he was afraid to go to sleep. For the past three days, George had been in a dreadful bad skin.

He had bought a jug of hard beer every day and by nighttime he was full. Like Mrs. Mother his mood worsened the more he drank, and Freddie was an easy target for his wrath.

Curled up as tightly as he could be, Freddie was listening. The night was full of sounds; the tapping of the trees against the window, mice scrabbling in the wainscot, footsteps in the street. They all frightened him. He would like to have wakened George but he dared not. He wished Lily would come back. He was hungry. George had bought cream cakes and fat, sticky buns but after a while even they were not satisfying.

Not for the first time, Freddie wondered what was going to become of him.

It was after midnight when he finally dropped into sleep. He didn't hear the creaking of the back door nor the cautious steps as somebody moved across the kitchen.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN



Constable Crabtree tapped on the wall outside Murdoch's cubicle, then popped his head through the reed curtain.

"Inspector would like to see you in his office, sir."

"This minute?" Murdoch was writing out his notes on what had happened so far with the Shaw case, and he was irritated at being interrupted.

"Yes, sir."

"What's he want?"

"He didn't say, sir." The constable answered the unspoken question. "He's a bit liverish this morning."

With a sigh, Murdoch got up and went upstairs to the inspector's office.

Brackenreid was standing at his window looking into the street below. He didn't turn around.

"I swear that was Colonel Grasett's carriage going by. He told me he'd just bought a pair of fine greys."

"Really, sir? How splendid."

Brackenreid swung around, trying to see if he could pin down the offence he sensed in Murdoch's tone but not quite able to. Seeing his bewilderment, Murdoch felt a twinge of shame that he was baiting the man. Even though Brackenreid's snobbery galled him, it was like teasing a simpleton.

"You wanted to see me?" He forced himself to speak in a neutral voice.

The inspector sat down behind his desk. He'd removed his serge jacket and was wearing a short-sleeved fishnet undershirt. The thick hair on his chest poked through the

holes. Murdoch thought he resembled a worn-down scrub brush. Omnipresent flies buzzed around the window and crawled across the big wooden desk. Murdoch was tempted to grab the swatter and send off a couple but he resisted. Why should he do Brackenreid's work? Last summer the inspector had assigned two of the youngest constables in the station to killing off all the flies. He'd fined them one cent for every fly he found alive.

Brackenreid squinted his eyes in a strange, leering way, and leaning forward in his seat, he said, "We have a spy and a saboteur in our midst and we must root him out at once."

Murdoch was taken aback.

"Sir?"

"Have you been paying attention to Crabtree's condition lately?"

"I beg your pardon, sir—"

"He doesn't look good. He's pasty, sluggish. When I asked him if anything was the matter, he said he's been having a touch of gastritis. Like hell he is."

He was trying so hard not to be overheard his voice was garbled and Murdoch could barely understand a word he said.

"Somebody is trying to poison him. Queer our chances in the pull. I'm convinced of it."

Murdoch stared at him. "Maybe he just has an upset stomach. Ate something that didn't agree with him."

"No. We went over everything that's gone into his mouth. Good wholesome food that his wife prepares. What he's always had."

"Why do you suspect poison?"

"Because a big, healthy man like him shouldn't be having bellyaches every day. Not like that. Somebody has made a wager against him and they want to make sure they win."

Brackenreid pulled at his moustache, putting the end in his mouth and sucking on it. "What's your opinion of

Seymour? He's a sour puss. I've never trusted the man."

"I can't imagine it, sir. Sergeant Seymour is a thoroughly decent man."

"Even the best can be tempted, Murdoch. Even the best."

"If I may say, Inspector, the evidence is not conclusive that Crabtree is being administered poison. Perhaps we should determine that before we look for a culprit."

Surprisingly, Brackenreid didn't lose his temper. "That's what I'm talking about, Murdoch. I want you to keep a close eye on him. I've instructed him not to eat or drink anything that his wife or you and me don't see first."

"All right."

"And I want you to taste everything before it goes into his mouth while he's here on duty."

"Sir?"

"Like Roman times. The emperors always had some slave sample their food first in case of poison."

"A slave!"

"Nothing wrong with that. They got to eat better than they would have normally."

"Unless they died first."

Brackenreid chuckled. "You'll be all right, Murdoch. You're clearly skeptical of the idea anyway. This'll put it to the test."

"I suppose it will."

"There's not a lot of time 'til the tournament. He's got to be in top shape."

Murdoch knew it was useless to try to reason with him. Once he had a bee in his bonnet, it would stay and buzz around there until it died of exhaustion.

"Is there anything else, sir?"

"No. You're proceeding with the River Street case, I presume?"

"Yes, sir."

Murdoch had not yet told Brackenreid about his interview with Mrs. Walter Pedlow. The inspector was jittery where Toronto's best society were concerned. If anything significant happened, Murdoch would tell him later.

"Have you nabbed the culprit yet?"

"Not yet, sir. The inquest was postponed until Friday because Mr. Johnson has the mumps."

"Does he? Poor fellow. That can do your member in forever. You can't get it up."

Murdoch thought he was wrong about that. He'd heard mumps could make you sterile but not impotent. However he let it go. Brackenreid didn't like to stand corrected about anything.

"Find the daughter," the inspector continued. "She's the guilty party. Those cripples are like savages. No morals at all."

"She's not a cripple, sir. Just deaf."

"Same thing. Anyway, Murdoch, don't dawdle. Get to it. And by the by, don't mention a word to Crabtree. Don't want to make him jumpy. Just watch him the way a tigress watches her cub."

"Yes, sir. Like a tigress." He stood up. "Do you mind?"

He picked up the flyswatter and before the inspector could reply, smacked two or three flies in quick succession. He laid the swatter down on the desk.

"Thank you, sir. The bloody things are enough to drive a man to drink."

He left.

Mary Golding hadn't seen George or Fred since yesterday morning, but she'd fried some chicken patties for herself and John to have at tea and she decided to take some over to the two boys. Poor mites, as she constantly referred to them. She put the food into a dish with some boiled potatoes, pinned on her shawl, and walked across the road

to Dolly's house. All the curtains were drawn, of course. She was glad she'd persuaded John to tack a black paper bow to the front door. Out of respect for Death, if not for Dolly Shaw.

She went up the steps, knocked on the door, and entered.

"Helloo! George! Freddie! It's Mrs. Golding."

There was no response at all. She called again, sniffing. There was a foul odour in the house. A smell she recognized from the time three years ago when she'd laid out her own mother. She assumed the rank stench lingered from Dolly. She really must help the boys clean up the place.

"Boys? Are you here? It's Mrs. Golding. I've brought you something for your tea."

The kitchen door was open. She was apprehensive now without quite knowing why. Cautiously, she entered the kitchen.

She was wrong about the origin of Death's stink. It wasn't from Dolly Shaw's corpse. The new source was the body which lay in a pool of blood in the middle of the kitchen floor.

Murdoch combed some brilliantine into his hair, smoothing out the waves at the sides. He also dabbed some on his moustache so that the hair shone sleek and dark. His cheeks and jaw were as smooth as soap and sharp razor could make them. He tilted the mirror on the dresser and took another anxious scrutiny, holding up two of his silk four-in-hands. For the past ten minutes, he'd been vacillating between the brown check, which was conservative, and the olive with the Persian design, which was more flamboyant. He'd scattered all his ties on the bed and he dropped the two current favourites and picked up a black one with a yellow-and-red floral pattern. This was better, suggesting a man of basically sober character but

not averse to adventure. Hurriedly, before he was again afflicted with indecision, he knotted the necktie around his high celluloid collar. He was going to be devilishly hot but it was worth it. Tonight he was off to attend Professor Otranto's salon. Permitted for the first time to join in with the other students at a real dance. He would be holding a real woman in his arms instead of his portly teacher.

With a final glance in the mirror, he slipped on his jacket. In anticipation of this event he'd splurged on a new cotton jacket with black and white stripes. He'd also bought a boater with a black band. He paused, not sure if the flowers in the tie went with the stripes. Too late now. It was already a quarter to eight and he'd better hurry. He planned to walk there as he didn't want to risk getting any bicycle grease on his white duck trousers. Also at the back of his mind, barely acknowledged, was the thought that he might escort one of the women students to her home afterwards. Easier to do that without a wheel.

He stuffed his patent leather dancing shoes into a brown paper bag and smoothed his hair one last time. That was a mistake because he now had grease on his fingers. He wiped them off on his handkerchief.

Outside in the hall, he paused at Enid's open door. She was clacking away at the typewriting machine and the little boy was lying on the bed. At first he seemed asleep but he lifted his head and coughed hard. He had been feverish for the past two days and now the cough. Everybody was worried, especially Mrs. Kitchen, frightened lest the consumption be passed on.

Murdoch tapped gently on the door and Enid turned around, smiling with pleasure when she saw him.

"Mr. Murdoch. What a swell you look then."

He felt a rush of warmth himself. And a twinge of guilt.

"Thank you. I'm off to my dancing class. It's a special evening. All the pupils get to dance together."

"I see."

Was it his imagination or did she look a bit dashed?

"The professor has said we can bring a guest when we're more practised. Perhaps you would join me?"

"Thank you, Mr. Murdoch, but I don't dance."

He felt foolish. Of course she didn't dance. She was a staunch Baptist.

Then the boy coughed again, distracting them.

"How is he?" Murdoch asked.

"A little better. He hasn't wanted to eat anything at all, but Mrs. Kitchen made some toast water and he liked that."

"Good...well I'd better be off, I'm late as it is."

She turned back to her work. "Good evening then."

"Good evening. *Nois da.*"

That netted him such a lovely smile he hurried off, all aglow, down the stairs. Neither of the Kitchens was abroad and he was glad, too self-conscious about his nobby appearance to want comment.

Professor Otranto finished sorting out the music and clapped his hands. He was short and round, with soft cheeks that folded over his collar. His wife on the other hand was a good eight inches taller with a strong beaky nose and chin. Murdoch often speculated that the dance teacher took the woman's part in more than just the waltz.

"Now then, ladies and gentlemen, we are about to begin. Our first dance will be a two-step. Not too difficult for all of you, I'm sure. Mr. Cockbourne, would you be so good as to escort Miss Dickenson to the floor. She is the charming young lady at the far end of the row."

With alacrity Cockbourne went to claim his partner, who blushed as pink as the muslin carnations she'd fastened to her dress.

"Mr. Murdoch, your partner is Miss Kirkpatrick. She is seated next to Miss Dickenson."

Murdoch walked across the slick dance floor toward the young woman, who was beaming at him happily, her head slightly cocked to one side. She was wearing a black taffeta skirt with a high-necked silk blouse of magenta and green stripes, and he was put to mind of a little parrot he'd seen once on a sailor's shoulder. He offered her his arm.

"Miss Kirkpatrick, may I have the honour?"

She jumped up and he led her to the floor, where the others were getting in place.

"Isn't this jolly?" she said, and Murdoch smiled in agreement.

She smelled overpoweringly of lavender and seemed to be caught in a fit of the giggles but he was charmed by her unaffected delight.

"Ladies and gentleman, are you ready?" Otranto called out to them. The students quieted down at once.

Madame Otranto, who was to play the piano for them, struck a couple of chords, glanced around, then plunged into a vigorous two-step. The professor started the call.

"Dud-duh, duh, duh, dud-duh, duh, duh; dud-duh, dud-duh, duh, duh. Kick. And *slide, slide*. Mr. Walker, lightly please! And back, *slide, slide*."

Miss Kirkpatrick's round cheeks were soon red with the exertion.

"Oh it's so jolly." She laughed. "My name's Clarice, what's yours?"

"Will," he managed to gasp out.

"Waltz coming up," shouted the professor. "And...one, two, three; one, two, three."

Murdoch remembered to hold his partner in correct dance position, his right hand in the centre of her back. She was very pliable. Otranto continued to count out the beat, and the dancers whirled. He hadn't made any mistakes so far, his partner's slippers were pristine.

"Advance," shouted Otranto, and while the women stayed in place, gracefully swaying with slightly lifted skirts,

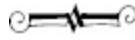
the men moved on around the circle. Murdoch executed that safely enough and skipped on to his next partner. She was short with abundant hair and for a moment made him think of Enid. She was too intent on dancing to smile, but he slipped his arm around her waist and went into the step.

“Tappedy, tappedy, tap, tap...”

He again managed the waltz perfectly and it was only as he progressed around the circle to meet his next partner that he became aware a man had entered the room and was standing by the door. A lanky man in a policeman’s uniform. Startled, Murdoch did the unforgivable and trod on the heels of the person in front of him, who bellowed and started to hop on one foot. The couple who were following behind collided as well.

But even in the general confusion and rush of apologies, Murdoch saw the constable had beckoned to him.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN



Murdoch regretted he'd left his wheel at home as he and Constable Wiggin jog-trotted up from King Street. In his hurry he'd forgotten to change out of his dancing slippers and by the time they reached the Shaw house, his feet felt bruised from contact with the macadam pavement. It was almost dark by now and the streetlamps struggled feebly to overcome the dusk that had crept across the city. Once again a crowd of curious onlookers was gathered on the sidewalk outside the house.

"What's going on, Officer?" called out one of the men, seeing them approach. Murdoch recognized him. He'd been in exactly the same spot before.

"It's not the poor bairns, is it?" a woman asked.

"Don't know anything yet," said Murdoch. "Now let me through."

They did at once, then closed ranks behind him like the sea.

There were no lights showing inside, but the constable on guard at the doorstep had lit his dark lantern and he held it aloft, waving it like a beacon. Murdoch went up the steps.

"Wiggin, stay out here, please. Burney, show me where." The constable stepped back into the hall.

"In the kitchen, sir." The door was ajar.

"Let's have some more light," said Murdoch and waited while Burney fumbled for a match and lit the candle in the wall sconce. His hands were trembling. Murdoch drew a deep breath. He wasn't exactly calm himself.

"Give me your lantern, Dick."

He did and Murdoch entered the kitchen, holding the light up high.

The beam illuminated the body of George Tucker.

He was lying on his stomach next to the stove. His face was turned towards the door and a knife protruded from the junction of his neck and shoulder. His eyes were open and blood had gushed from his mouth so that there was a dark pool, thick with flies, all around his head. He was dressed only in a nightshirt, which had been soaked with blood.

Murdoch flashed the light around the room. It appeared undisturbed. He shouted to the constable.

“Burney, find me some more frigging candles, it’s dark as the Devil’s asshole in here.”

The constable came in, avoiding looking at the dead boy.

“There’s one on the table,” said Murdoch. He waited until Burney had lit the stub, then he went over to the body, knelt down, and touched the boy’s cheek lightly with the back of his hand. The skin was cold and clammy. Burney edged closer.

“He’s just a lad, isn’t he, sir? Who would do such a thing?”

Murdoch stood up. “Up to us to find out, isn’t it?”

He was being snappy but he couldn’t help it. Protruding from the skimpy nightshirt, George’s legs were scrawny, virtually hairless. He looked like a little child.

“There’s another candlestick on that sideboard. Bring it over here and hold both of them close.”

Murdoch placed the lantern on the table and together with the two candles, he had sufficient light for a cursory examination of the body. The skin was already blackening and the blood had congealed on the nightshirt.

Tenderly, as if it mattered, Murdoch moved the boy’s head. It turned freely enough. He tested the arms and legs which had now lost the stiffness of death.

“Shine the lantern here a minute.”

Burney, still shaky, brought the light closer to George's back. Murdoch could see a narrow puncture just between the shoulder blades. From the amount of blood that had flowed from the wound, he assumed the knife had pierced a lung. There didn't seem to be another wound except the final deadly blow to the neck. He examined both hands but there were no signs of cuts on the palms or fingers. No evidence of a struggle.

"See if there's a match to this knife in any of the drawers," he told Burney. He stood up. The kitchen was tidy enough except for a half-eaten loaf of bread and a rind of cheese on the table.

Burney was investigating the sideboard, and he held up a knife with a yellowish bone handle. It was identical to the murder weapon.

"There's two more in here, sir."

"Keep it out. We'll show it to the coroner. God, I need some air. Let's go into the hall. Leave the candles."

Burney followed him.

"You got some blood on your trousers, sir."

Murdoch looked down at his knee, which was stained.

"Damn it."

"Sorry we had to spoil your dance, Mr. Murdoch. The sergeant thought as it was your case, you should be gotten."

Murdoch moistened his handkerchief and wiped off the mark as best he could.

"I don't suppose you've checked the rest of the house, have you?" he asked the constable.

"No, sir."

"Come on then, there's two other people who live here normally. A boy and a woman. Let's see if they're with the quick or the dead."

He went to the centre of the hall and called.

"Hullo? Anybody here? Freddie, it's Detective Murdoch...are you here? Don't be afraid."

The house was silent as only a place of death can be silent.

Murdoch approached the closed parlour door. Fear of what he might find made his stomach shrink but he had no choice. He thrust it open. Empty. It didn't look changed from when he'd last seen it.

"Let's go upstairs. Take that candle."

He led the way up to the narrow landing.

"Hello! Freddie, are you up here?" He paused, his voice sinking into the silence like ink on blotting paper. He nodded at Burney.

"I'll do it."

The door to the boy's room was partially open. He pushed it all the way, waited, then stepped inside. It was empty. He crouched down and shone the light underneath the bed. Nothing except for two pairs of worn boots and a full slop pail.

On the chair was a small pile of clothes, a pair of brown plaid trousers, and a holland shirt, shabby and torn. There was another bundle on the floor. Black serge trousers and a blue, well-patched shirt.

"Looks like Freddie ran off without his clothes," he said to Burney who was standing at the threshold.

"D'you think he's the one done it, sir? They might have had a row, lad snatches up the carving knife. Then nub nux. Didn't mean to do it, but too late now, isn't it?"

Murdoch shrugged. He didn't think so. For one thing, Freddie was smaller than George and he'd seemed a timid lad. On the other hand, sometimes the worm will turn. Perhaps the boy had been provoked beyond endurance. He hoped that wasn't what had happened.

"Looks bad on him if he has done a bunk. He'd be here if he's innocent," added the constable.

"Or he could be dead too."

"Maybe it was a kelp as did the lad in, then. Maybe the old lady had a stash hidden somewhere. Same person as did

for her, came back to find the loot. The boy surprised him. Slam. He's done for."

"If he came upon a burglar why was he stabbed in the back?"

"Maybe he was trying to get away?"

"He's not facing the door. He must have been going towards the cupboard."

"Could have been terrified into next year. Ran blindly."

"I don't think he'd be that confused in his own house."

Murdoch stepped back. "All right. There's nothing else to get here. We'll take a better gander in the daylight. Let's see the other room."

They went across the landing. Once again Murdoch pushed open the door and shone in the lantern before entering. The room was just as he'd left it. Tidy. Empty.

He turned back to the constable. "Get off to the station and tell Sergeant Seymour to call up the coroner. Johnson has the mumps so it'll have to be Mr. Vaux. We'll need the police ambulance. I'll check out the backyard and the privy."

"Do you think we're looking for soul cases or live folks?"

"I don't know, Dick. I wish I did."

Murdoch put his glass on the table. The Goldings' neighbour Mrs. Daly had come to be with Mrs. Golding and had brought over a jug of homemade raspberry vinegar, which she claimed was the best thing for fright. Murdoch was handed a glass as soon as he came in. It was certainly reviving, and Mrs. Golding was looking better by the minute. He could detect generous amounts of brandy but if Mrs. Golding was aware this was in the recipe, she didn't protest.

"Some more, Mr. Murdoch?" Mrs. Daly asked, picking up the jug.

"No, thank you, ma'am, that was plenty for me. And delicious if I may say so."

The neighbour looked pleased. She turned to Mrs. Golding who was getting quite flushed. "Mary?"

"I don't think so, thank you, Philomena."

"Nonsense. You've had the most dreadful fright. One more will put you right." She poured another large glassful and Mary took a gulp.

When Murdoch first arrived, she had indeed been in a state of nervous prostration. Mrs. Daly was waving a bottle of salvolatile under her nose, causing Mary to cough and choke alarmingly. When she was sufficiently recovered, however, she had managed to give her story coherently enough. She hadn't seen either of the boys since the previous evening when she'd noticed both of them walking along Wilton Street towards the house. She hadn't heard any sound at all from them after that. She knew definitely it was six o'clock when she'd gone over, because she wanted to make sure she was back in plenty of time to serve Mr. Golding's tea at half-past six.

"They seemed such little orphans," she repeated. She'd already said that but it was as if the observation was fresh each time.

"Ragamuffins, if you ask me," said Mrs. Daly. "They weren't Dolly's own children, that was clear. Heathens more than likely, with no conscience. That's what comes of being brought up with no Christian guidance."

Mary Golding wiped away more tears that kept spilling from her eyes. Her words were slightly slurred. "The older boy, the one who is dead, he could be quite savage to the other child. Just yesterday, I saw him hit him so hard the poor little mite almost fell over."

"Poor little mite indeed! That same mite is likely to grow up a candidate for the old nevergreen."

Murdoch looked at the three people in front of him. John Golding was across the road with the coroner. He'd been sworn as a juror and was presently viewing the body.

Clarence Daly was sitting in the corner. So far he'd said nothing and his wife acted as if he weren't there at all.

"You are all certain that you heard nothing in the Shaw house, around eleven or twelve last night?" Murdoch asked them.

He'd already had their answers but sometimes it was worth another prod. Mrs. Daly looked as if she would have manufactured something if she could but she shook her head reluctantly.

"No, Mr. Daly and me were in our Christian beds at ten o'clock on the dot and slept as sound as planks, didn't we, Clarence?"

Her husband hesitated. "Well, I could have heard somebody crying out."

"What do you mean crying out? You were fast asleep like me. How could you?"

Mr. Daly shuffled his feet, torn between the fear of displeasing his wife and being important in the eyes of the police.

"I had to get up, see..." More shuffle. "Excuse me, Mary. I had to use the commode. Our bedroom window was open and I thought I heard a cry. Didn't know if it was a cat or what. There's one that keeps coming around and smelling up our front porch."

He had everybody's attention now and it gave him confidence.

"Why didn't you say this before?" said Murdoch.

"I've been sitting here a thinking when it was I got up, and it probably was close to midnight. But like I says, I thought it was a tom."

"Don't dither, Clarence Daly, was it a cat or a human soul?" His wife spoke with asperity.

"I'd say now as I've considered the matter, it was a human cry."

"Male or female?" Murdoch asked.

"Not sure, sir. But perhaps more likely the weaker vessel."

"Can you describe the sound more exactly?" asked Murdoch.

Daly put back his head and to everybody's astonishment let out a strange howling.

"Clarence!" exclaimed his wife, as if he'd done something as shameful as pull down his trousers in public.

"That's the kind of cries the dummy would make," said Mrs. Golding.

Philomena nodded. "You're right about that, Mary. It is like."

Pleased with himself, Clarence bayed again. It was a similar sound to the cry that had come from Lily when Murdoch and Crabtree appeared at the house last Thursday.

"Did you see Mrs. Shaw's daughter?"

"No. Didn't look out or anything. Could have been her. Could have been that cat that's been prowling around, stinking up the porch."

"Must have been Lily," said his wife. "Another heathen."

"Have you seen anything at all of Miss Shaw?" Murdoch asked Mrs. Golding.

"Not since her mother passed on."

"Seems to me Lily did in her own flesh and blood and then murdered the foster child. I always knew she was a madwoman," said Mrs. Daly.

"I didn't," interjected Clarence, emboldened. "Just seemed like a poor afflicted soul to me."

Murdoch jumped in before a quarrel could start. "She's disappeared. If it was her that you heard, we'd like to talk to her. Do you have any idea where she might be hiding? And the other boy? Any relatives or particular friends that you know of who might take him in?"

"Not a one," answered Mrs. Daly. "They had hardly any company. She wasn't the sort of woman we wanted to

associate with. When she first came here to live we did, of course, make overtures, didn't we, Mary?"

Mrs. Golding nodded and Mrs. Daly went on.

"We called on her." She tightened her mouth at the memory. "First off, she seemed to be thoroughly intoxicated even though it was only two o'clock in the afternoon; secondly—"

"She took us into her parlour." Mary Golding joined in eagerly now. "She didn't offer us any refreshment or make any enquiries but right away she began to talk about the furniture and how grand it was."

"That was the drink—"

"She said she used to be grand herself, a professional woman, she said, but she had fallen on hard times through no fault of her own."

"What had happened?" asked Murdoch.

"She didn't say." Mrs. Daly took back the narrative, firmly. "Just made all sorts of hints that her own daughter had brought about her ruin. Mary and me didn't know what to think—"

"Poor unfortunate girl."

"Then she began to brag on and on about the people she knew. Society people she said. Well, I am a charitable person, Mr. Murdoch, but frankly I didn't believe a word of it."

"Neither did I." Mrs. Golding tried to insert herself back in the conversation, with no success.

"She must have sensed our reservations," added Philomena. "The next thing we knew she had gone to a big desk that was under the window. She had the key on a cord around her neck." Mrs. Daly pursed her lips again. "She brought out an autograph album. The way she handled it, you'd think she had signatures from the royal family—"

"She said it was her record book—" piped Mary, very flushed now.

“That’s right. I asked her, ‘A record of what?’ ‘Of the signs of the world,’ she said and gave the most unpleasant sort of laugh–”

“Gave me the shivers. I mentioned it to John when I came home–”

Philomena interrupted. “At that moment, the poor dummy came in with some tea and Mrs. Shaw screamed at her. I’ve never seen such appalling behaviour.”

Mrs. Golding nodded vigorously. “She said Lily had brought in the wrong cups.”

“No, it was on the wrong tray. Regardless, it was quite unreasonable. Absolutely nothing would please her. The dummy, of course, couldn’t say anything. It was like seeing somebody beat a dog in public. Mary and I left as soon as we could.”

Mrs. Golding agreed. Mrs. Daly rumbled on.

“After that we wouldn’t subject any other Christian women to that treatment. We warned all the other ladies in the neighbourhood. Virtually no one else called on her. She made herself half-decent for a while but only when she wanted to borrow something.”

“Money?” Murdoch asked.

“Yes, and household goods. I lent her one of my frying pans and I’ve yet to see it. Any money you might as well consider a charity gift.”

“What did the record book look like?”

“It was yellow,” said Mrs. Golding.

“No, dear. Forgive me but that is not correct. The book was green, Mr. Murdoch. Covered with silk moire I’d say.”

“Leather,” muttered Mary.

“The boys liked to play by the river,” said Mr. Daly suddenly. “I’ve seen them coming back with fish. The darkie might have run off there to hide.”

Mrs. Golding looked up out of her handkerchief where she had taken temporary respite. “Do you think something has happened to him, Mr. Murdoch? Something bad?”

"I don't know, ma'am. It's possible he witnessed the murder and ran off in fear of his life or—"

Daly said, "He could have killed George himself and done a bunk."

"I can't believe that. He is just a child..." Mary's voice trailed off.

"She's very soft-hearted, Mr. Murdoch. Weeps if a bird dies. But we can't deceive ourselves, Mary. The boy might be dead too, buried somewhere..."

"Mr. Murdoch, is that so?"

"I'm afraid it's not out of the question, Mrs. Golding."

"I tell you, Officer," interjected Mrs. Daly. "Me and Clarence are strong churchgoers, Methodist. I never saw Dolly Shaw step foot on even so much as the threshold of any church that I know of. None of them did. I hate to say it, but no doubt justice was done. The wicked shall get their due."

That didn't sound quite right to Murdoch but maybe it was a Methodist saying.

Freddie had run to the empty house next to them, squeezing between the planks that boarded up the door. He cowered in the corner of the kitchen for hours, expecting to be discovered at any moment. No one came, and after a long time he almost wished they would.

He was so hungry he was sucking on his knuckles as if he were a baby. His stomach hurt. There was a pile of old potato sacks against the wall and he slept on those even though they smelled of mice droppings and sour food. He dared not go outside in case someone saw him, so he had relieved himself in the farthest corner, covering it as best he could with some straw that was scattered about the floor. He moaned constantly, almost unaware that he was doing so. He had no plan, could think of nothing except how to survive the next moment and then the next.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN



Murdoch returned to the Shaw house first thing the next morning. George's body had been moved to the undertakers on Yonge Street, but where he had lain was demarcated by the stencil of congealed blood on the oilcloth. Murdoch went over to the place, standing in the clean area as much as possible. He was near the large pine cupboard. One of the doors was unfastened and he opened it. Inside were a few plates and bowls, some chipped mugs. He pretended to reach for something. One blow from behind, he staggered forward; another blow to the neck and he crumbled to the floor, falling sideward. His position fitted exactly with the angle of George's body and suggested his assailant had come from around the table. Was that who was eating the bread and cheese? It didn't make sense that George had surprised a stranger, some thief breaking in for a bit of supper. He would not have advanced into the room if he perceived he was in danger.

Murdoch sat down at the table, taking the chair that faced the door. The used plate was directly in front of him, the loaf of bread at his right hand. The murder weapon was a bread knife. What seemed likely was that George entered the kitchen, saw the person, but wasn't perturbed enough to turn and run. In fact, at some point he went toward the cupboard. Was there a quarrel? Some provocation so severe that the other person snatched the bread knife, ran at George from behind and delivered two powerful blows. The first wound punctured the lung and a fine spray of blood had covered the corner of the table. There were several sheets

hanging on a rack between the windows. The ones closest to the cupboard looked as if they had been dyed pink. Murdoch rubbed one of them between his fingers. It was good quality linen. Somebody was going to be missing their laundry soon.

Given that the murder looked like an unpremeditated act, Murdoch expected that the killer panicked and ran out, most likely by the shortest route to the door. That would take them right across the path of the body and the blood. He crouched down and moved slowly forward. Nothing that he could see, just some scuff marks and bits of mud which were probably left by the jurors who had viewed the body.

He spent the next half hour examining the kitchen, but could find nothing else that seemed relevant to the murder. He was glad to move on to the rest of the house. Reenacting the attack had brought back disturbing memories. He knew the shock and pain of an unexpected blow. His father had landed many of them. Worse had been the sight of his young brother, Albert, knocked senseless for some misdemeanour he had no awareness of. Murdoch's own rage churned biliously in his stomach. It had not diminished after all these years. Murderous anger was an emotion he could understand.

He went into the parlour, opening the curtains this time and thrusting up all the window sashes. Mrs. Daly had spoken about an album. An important book by the sound of it. He hadn't seen it the first time he examined the room but he had more idea now of what he was looking for.

For the next hour he searched thoroughly, taking up the carpet, a once-luxurious Axminster, moving aside all the grand furniture. Nothing. He wondered if he'd misinterpreted the money in Dolly's pocket. Perhaps she herself intended to pay somebody. According to the neighbours she owed money. Maybe one of her creditors got fed up with waiting. Lost his temper and sent her off. That possibility didn't sit right though and he felt frustrated. Once

again there were too many paths to go down. He left and went upstairs.

Lily's room was untouched as far as he could see but he sieved through it again just in case. It yielded nothing.

The boys' room was also the same as he'd seen it last. He'd done no more than a perfunctory search before. The room was so bare and, at that point, he didn't suspect either of the two boys. Perhaps he was wrong. He remembered the whispers while he was in Lily's room. Were they hiding evidence? If so, what?

When he was about George's age he'd started to steal tobacco plugs from his father. His father hadn't seemed to notice and young Murdoch chewed away, savouring not the bitter taste but the defiance, the secret victory. He kept the stash under his mattress and was never found out.

Murdoch went over to the bed and with a heave turned over the mattress. It was filthy but intact, and nothing lay underneath it on the iron bedsprings. However, the one pillow fell to the floor and he could see wool stuffing dribbling out of one end. He picked it up and patted it. There was something firm in the middle. Too small to be the album, but something hidden. He fished inside and his fingers came in contact with what felt like a roll of paper. He pulled it out in a flurry of wool bits which stuck to his fingers like Golding's tubercles. He shook them off and unwrapped the bundle, which was in a piece of the *Globe*. Inside was a wad of bills, mostly one dollar in denomination. He counted them. Forty-three dollars. He couldn't believe the money was George's or Freddie's. They would be lucky to have twenty-five cents to their name. He probed the pillow's innards again and this time plucked out a leather cord at the end of which dangled a small brass key. Looked like the missing desk key.

He riffled the notes. Forty-three dollars wasn't a lot of money but perhaps enough to kill for if you were as destitute as these boys were. He folded the wad and put it

in one of his envelopes. He would have discarded the newspaper, but suddenly a photograph caught his eye. A group of people on a lawn. In the centre was his honour, Walter Pedlow, seated with a rug over his legs. A younger man was to his right. Murdoch peered closer. The picture was fuzzy but he recognized this fellow. He was the one who had partnered Annie Brogan at the Derby. The too-long hair and thick moustache were unmistakable. He read the caption. "His honour, Walter Pedlow, at the reception of his nephew, Henry, recently returned from India. Mrs. Walter Pedlow is to the left of her husband and their ward, Miss Sarah Carswell, is directly in front of her."

Maud had her head turned away from the camera. Somebody had circled the child's face.

Murdoch felt a flush of excitement. Don't tell me there's no connection between Dolly Shaw and the Pedlows. Never heard of the woman, my eye! And why is Henry Pedlow hanging around Annie Brogan if they're all such total strangers? The date of the paper was at the top, Wednesday, July 17, and there was a brownish stain across the side that looked like blood. He placed it in the envelope with the money.

There was nothing else in the room, just the fetid stink of misery.

It was approaching noon when he got back to the station. As he entered, the duty sergeant, Seymour of the sour puss, called him over.

"Package for you, Will, just arrived."

He handed him a large brown envelope. It had the coroner's seal on the back and Murdoch took it with him to his cubicle at the rear. He felt as if the smell of death clung to his clothes and he removed his jacket, putting it on the peg by the door. Her Majesty watched him benignly.

Vaux, the coroner, had sent on a copy of the doctor's post mortem examination.

This is to certify that I, Robert Joseph Grieg, a legally qualified physician of the city of Toronto, did this day make a post mortem examination upon the body of a person identified as George Tucker, with the following result.

The body is that of a youth of about thirteen years of age, undernourished. Genitalia is mature. Rigor mortis was resolving with some remaining rigidity in the feet. Abdominal organs, kidneys, normal in size. There were signs of worm infestation in the lower bowel. Both legs were curved concavely. In my opinion evidence of childhood rickets. The entire chest cavity and pleura were filled with blood, the result of two stab wounds to the back, one close to the left scapula, and approximately seven and one half inches below the occiput, the other slightly higher, that is six inches from the occiput but the same distance from the scapula. Both wounds punctured the left lung. The third wound was at the junction of the left clavicle and the thoracic vertebrae. This wound severed the aorta. The knife had penetrated to a depth of four inches. Most of the body's blood had drained from these wounds. The murder weapon is an ordinary kitchen knife with a saw-tooth edge and a bone handle. In my opinion all blows were administered with great force from above by a person who is right-handed. Respectfully submitted, Robert Grieg M. D.

The language was cool and clinical, as it should be, but Murdoch felt troubled by what it meant in human terms. Dr. Grieg had written, "genitalia mature," but George Tucker was far from adulthood in size and strength. He'd had so

little comfort in his short life and the brutality of his death was surely undeserved.

Murdoch returned the report to the envelope and stood up. He needed to be active. He left his cubicle and went to the off-duty room to see who was there. Crabtree was sitting at the table and he was about to take a big swallow from a bottle of stout.

“Wait!”

Startled, Crabtree halted, the bottle held in midair.

“Let me have a sip, I’m parched.”

Surprised, Crabtree handed over the bottle. Murdoch paused. He thought Brackenreid was as full of wind as a barber’s cat but...he sniffed at the bottle, the rich smell of stout wafting up to him. What now? If he himself dropped dead in violent spasms it wouldn’t necessarily help Crabtree. The constable was watching him curiously.

“Something wrong, sir?”

“Did you open this yourself?”

“Yes, sir.”

“What are you eating?”

“Some bread and ham that my wife put up.” He looked uneasy. “You’ve been talking to the inspector, haven’t you? He keeps dropping these peculiar hints that somebody is trying to poison me.”

“It’s not out of the question,” Murdoch said reluctantly. “How’s your stomach?”

“Not too good, sir. Bit of the cramps.”

While he was speaking, he took out a small pillbox and shook four green-coloured tablets into his palm.

“What’s that?”

“Strengthening pills the inspector gave me. He got them from the Sears catalogue. Special order.”

“Can I have a look?”

Crabtree gave him the pillbox and Murdoch sniffed at it.

“Smells like almonds.”

“That’s the flavouring.”

"Hey, hold on, Crabtree, it says here to take four a day. At intervals. Why are you taking them all at once?"

"I'm not exactly. The inspector recommended that I increase the dosage seeing as I'm big. I'm taking four pills six times a day."

"Maybe you should cut it back. They may be upsetting your stomach."

Crabtree looked dubious. "The inspector was insistent, Mr. Murdoch. You know how he is."

"I certainly do. Look, lend me the box for a couple of hours. I'll do a bit of research."

"I don't think--"

"I'll take full responsibility."

"All right. But I wouldn't take too long if I were you, sir."

Murdoch put the pillbox in his pocket.

"I'm off to see the Brogan woman. See what she has to say for herself this time."

"Dreadful to think of that poor lad being done in like he was."

"I want to make sure the other young titch isn't going to be sent off either. If he's still alive that is. Crabtree, don't buy any apples from ugly old women."

"Sir?"

"Never mind, just joking you."

Murdoch left, realizing he hadn't tasted the stout and feeling like a yellow coward as a result. Mr. Bright the druggist was standing in exactly the same place behind the counter as when Murdoch had seen him previously. He beamed a smile of recognition as the detective entered the shop.

"I've another request, Mr. Bright."

"Ask away. Anything to help safeguard the law."

Murdoch gave him the pillbox.

"Can you tell me what are the ingredients of these tablets?" He paused and glanced around the little shop. "A

man's life could be saved. A good man too. A strong Christian."

The druggist looked solemn, as befitted the responsibility.

"I'll run some tests. Can't get back to you 'til later this afternoon, though."

"That would be fine. I'll drop by."

"You don't need to. We've a telephone put in. Just last week. See?" He pointed proudly behind him where a shiny black walnut box was fastened to the wall. "I can call you up at the station as soon as I've done."

Murdoch thanked him. He felt obliged to show his appreciation more tangibly because he didn't think Mr. Bright had much custom.

"Do you have anything for sweetening the breath?"

"Wife complained, has she?"

Murdoch murmured unintelligibly.

"Is it teeth or tobacco? Causing the problem, I mean. If it's teeth, I've got whole line of homeopathic tinctures that'll take away pain and odour both. If it's tobacco, I've got some cachous that'd make Beezelbub himself acceptable."

"Should work for me then. I'll take a tin of those."

Warming to his task, Mr. Bright began to suggest other remedies for ills that Murdoch sincerely hoped he'd never have. He managed to withstand the Peruvian wine of coca for strengthening and the electricating liniment for sprains but succumbed to a few sticks of olive wax pomatum for his hair.

His package stuffed in his pocket, he edged out of the shop, Mr. Bright still suggesting medicines he might like.

As he stepped outside, he almost collided with a young woman who was walking at a brisk pace down Parliament Street.

He tipped his hat. "Sorry, ma'am."

Initially the woman was prepared to be cross at his clumsiness, but suddenly she smiled up at him.

“Mr. Murdoch. What a surprise.”

For a moment, he didn't recognize the chubby, rose-cheeked face below him, then he realized it was his dancing partner from the previous evening. She was soberly dressed today in a charcoal-coloured silk cape and black skirt. Only in the crimson plumage and cherries that decorated her straw hat were there indications of the little exotic bird he'd danced with.

“Miss er...”

“Kirkpatrick. Clarice. I do hope the matter wasn't too dreadfully serious that made you run off like that.”

“Unfortunately, it was.”

She gazed up at him curiously but he didn't elaborate. He never talked about police work if he could avoid it. People had very odd reactions.

“Where are you off to in such a hurry?” he asked her.

“I'm going to work.” She giggled a little. “I'm always late and today won't be any exception.” She pointed down the street. “I work at Heineman's on King Street. I sing the latest songs for people to hear before they purchase the sheet.”

“How marvellous.”

“You should come and hear me sometime. You can pretend to be a customer. They'll never know.”

“Thank you. I will.”

Miss Kirkpatrick had pretty blue eyes which were twinkling at him, but she wasn't a coquette, rather a simple, open-hearted young woman.

“Promise?”

He smiled. “I promise.”

“And will you be at the next dance party?”

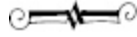
“Only a tidal wave would stop me.”

The red cherries bounced a little as she lowered her head with a blush.

“I'll say good afternoon then, and be on my way. I don't want to get sacked.”

Murdoch watched her briefly, admiring the jauntiness of her steps. The encounter warmed him. He sighed and retrieved his wheel from the curb. He didn't expect his next meeting would be as pleasant.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN



As Murdoch crossed the intersection of Parliament and Queen, two boys dashed in front of him, kicking an inflated pig's bladder back and forth between them. They were ordinary-looking boys, reasonably well cared for, and he thought about the boy who no longer had a future of any kind. He'd pay for a Mass for his soul when he went to church on Sunday. Distracted, he didn't dodge the fresh horse droppings in the road and the bits of manure flew up into his face. He cursed.

He cycled past the Derby which was quiet, not open for business yet. Close by, the foundry was belching salmon-coloured angry smoke. Thor with stomachache. Or a case of poisoning.

On Front Street, he turned east and immediately hit the strong cool wind from the lake. Pushing against it was like riding uphill. His legs were aching from this morning's hard training ride and he didn't feel like another challenge. He cursed again.

The steel-blue lake glittered in the sun, and a steamer chugged and puffed on its way, heading for Buffalo. A fat, dark plume of smoke, more tranquil than the foundry, was drifting from the tall stacks of the Gooderham and Worts Distillery, which was busy making the devil's brew, as Mr. Golding would have called it. In spite of the fact Murdoch disliked the self-righteous stance of so many Temperance folk, he also had some sympathy with their views. He'd seen what drunkenness did. His own father for one. As a young man, Murdoch had, in fact, taken the pledge. He'd lasted six

months full of virtue, might have gone on to be an unbearable prig until he was offered a swig of cool ale at the end of a strenuous day of chopping. He was seduced and was conquered. Nothing he could remember had ever tasted as good as that smooth brew against his parched throat.

He was on Cherry Street now and he turned south, past a long trim warehouse. Opposite, close to the lakeshore, was the big distillery and the sweet smell of the whiskey was on the wind.

Mill Street was a narrow dirt road, dotted profusely with mounds of manure. It was the route to and from the distillery and many huge draft horses plodded by daily. The Brogan sisters lived at the end of a row of workmen's cottages. Theirs was distinguished by the height and abundance of the weeds that grew in front.

He must have pounded on the door for several minutes and was about to give up when Annie finally came to answer.

Shielding her eyes from the light, she squinted at him.

"What now?"

"Can I come in?"

She shrugged. "If you want to. The place isn't too tidy. I haven't got going yet."

He stepped inside. The front door opened directly into the one room of the house, where she and her sister obviously slept. Annie dumped a pile of undergarments off the single chair.

"Here, sit down. I'd offer you some char but we're all out. My sister isn't the best manager in the world. She's at work now." She nodded in the direction of the window. "At the distillery. She glues the labels on the bottles." She yawned. "Could you stand me a bit of shag? I'm all out of that too."

"You mean tobacco?"

"That's it."

Murdoch took out his tobacco pouch and shook some Badger into her open hand. She reached over to the washstand and picked up a clay pipe.

"You can have a smoke too," she said. "I don't mind."

"Not right now."

He waited while she lit up and took a deep draw. She was the first woman he'd ever seen smoking and it was odd. As if Mr. Kitchen would take up crocheting.

Through the fog she smiled at him. "Why should men have all the fun? A find it calming, don't you?"

"Yes, I do."

"All right, Mr. Murdoch. What's happened now?"

He got straight to the point.

"There's been another death. A murder."

"What are you talking about?"

"Last night we found the body of a young boy. His name was George Tucker and he was Mrs. Shaw's foster son."

"My God. What happened?" She was gazing at him in horror.

"Do you mean how was he killed?"

"Yes. Was it a fight?"

"Possibly. He was stabbed to death."

"My God," she said again. "But who would do that to a child?"

"He wasn't exactly a child. He must have been thirteen or fourteen."

She tamped down the tobacco in the pipe with the end of a spoon, not looking at him. "That's dreadful. I'm real sorry to hear it." More agitated tamping. "But why've you come here? What's it got to do with me?"

"That's for you to tell me."

"Mr. Murdoch. For Christ's sake. I've already told you I didn't know the woman, let alone this nipper."

"That's what you said, but you never know, things come back to us after a while. And seeing as how I'd come before,

I thought it only right I should tell you what happened. See if in the shock, as it were, your memory got jogged."

"How could it if there was nothing there in the first place?"

"Course we don't know yet why the boy was killed, but it's highly likely the two deaths are connected."

"How d'you mean?"

"He probably knew something. Maybe even knew who killed his foster mother. Saw somebody!"

Annie's pipe was unheeded, about to go out. "Look. Let me scrounge around a bit. Maybe I can find some char. Cheer us both up, won't it."

She went into the tiny adjoining room and he heard her banging cupboards around.

"Good news," she called to him. "Millie was hiding some on me. There's enough for both of us."

"You have it. I've had mine already."

"Suit yourself."

More thumping. The sound of a poker in a grate. She came back into the living room.

"It'll just take a minute for the kettle to boil."

Plopping down on the bed, she reached for the pipe.

"Other than me, do you have any suspects?"

"Dolly's daughter is still missing. She's a likely one."

"If anybody had a reason to off Dolly Shaw, she did."

"Why's that?"

Annie froze, realizing what she'd said.

"You told me the old lady was cruel to her daughter."

"I don't remember saying anything of the kind."

"Yes, you did. How would I know otherwise?"

"Exactly my thought."

Suddenly the kettle whistled shrilly, and she jumped up to tend to the tea. He heard the clink of cup and saucer, the vigorous stirring of the pot.

She came back carrying a tea tray, but she had regained her composure and she was once again in control

of the situation. An entertainer who knew how to command attention. Murdoch didn't know how to get back his advantage.

"I remember now," she said, rather coyly. "It wasn't you who told me, it was the manager at the Derby. I had to explain what you were doing there. He knew somebody who lived up near Dolly. She'd told him about the daughter and how bad her mother treated her. Here."

She handed him a cup, which was quite elegant except for a long crack on one side and a saucer that didn't match. Murdoch had a sense of unreality. Here he was sitting next to a woman's unmade bed, that woman barely clothed, constantly revealing generous amounts of flesh, offering him tea in a fine china cup.

"Eager, are we?"

"What?"

"You said you didn't want tea and now look at you, snatching at it."

Her glance actually flickered over his crotch. Murdoch felt a rush of anger up his back.

"Miss Brogan, I'm a police detective investigating two violent deaths. Now maybe that's nothing extraordinary to you but it is to me. I don't want tea or anything else you're offering. I'd just like some straight answers."

She actually flushed. "You don't have to get funny. I'm sorry about the boy, but I can't help you. I never seen him or the old woman."

"And you're sticking to that story?"

"Frigging right. It's my word against the sodding blind neighbour. You can't prove anything either way."

She stirred her tea with the handle end of a knife. "Besides, it don't mean that the woman who went into the house, if there was such a bint, it don't necessarily follow that she was the gallows finder, does it?"

"No, it doesn't. But it might be very helpful to talk to her."

Annie kept stirring. "We could all do with a bit of help in this world, couldn't we?"

"One more question, Annie. Why is Henry Pedlow paying court to you?"

She looked at him blankly. "Who's he when he's at home?"

"Mrs. Pedlow's nephew by marriage. He's the fellow who was waiting outside your dressing room the other day." She still looked puzzled. "He danced with you. Right after me. Dark hair, long. Sallow complexion."

"Jules! Gave his name as Jules LaVerne."

"He's Henry Pedlow. He's just got back from India."

For the first time, she appeared frightened. "What's he doing hanging around me?"

"That's what I'd like to know. What did he want?"

Annie stared at him for a moment, tried to look cynical, but her expression was weary.

"What'd you think? What you want, what they all want. But don't worry. I wasn't interested in that dried-up piece of shoe leather."

"I wasn't. Worried, I mean."

Annie shrugged. "He said he wanted to send me red roses as an expression of his appreciation and admiration."

"That's it?"

"That's a lot for starters. Flowers now, next the best French bon-bons, then a nice pair of combs. Why are you men so predictable? You can have all the evil thoughts you like. Flog yourself with them if you want. I'm not for hire. I go with whoever I choose."

At that moment there was a loud knocking at the door.

"Annie! Annie! Rise and shine, my girl."

She jumped up. "Mother of God! That's a gentleman friend who's coming to take me to luncheon. Don't want him to see me like this."

She turned her back, undoing her dressing robe as she went towards the paper screen that was in the corner of the

room. There she paused, and said over her shoulder, "Go tell him I'll be just a minute, there's a good-heart."

The robe slipped just below her plump, naked buttocks and she held it draped there for a second. An excellent exit.

The eager suitor knocked again, thunderously.

"Annie. Get up or I'll break the door down."

"Please Mr. Murdoch," said Annie from behind the screen. "Shut him up or we'll have the landlord in here. He lives in the next house."

Annoyed, Murdoch went to answer the door. The young man outside had his fist lifted ready to thump once more and he froze in mid gesture.

"Who are you?" he asked belligerently.

"A police officer and if you don't quiet down I'll have you up on a charge of drunk and disorderly."

"I'm not drunk," said the man. He was wearing a wide-brimmed hat and a bird's eye cravat. A country boy if ever there was one.

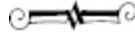
"Go to the end of the street and wait there. Silently. You sound like a bull in rut. She'll be there in a minute."

"Less than that," said Annie and she stepped from the screen. She had dressed very quickly indeed and she was still pinning up her hair as she came to the door.

"Thomas, you are a one. I'm ready." She glanced at Murdoch. "I wish you luck with the case."

Thomas beamed in triumph and offered her his arm. They walked off, leaving Murdoch to close the door behind them as if he were the butler.

CHAPTER NINETEEN



This time Burns was much friendlier, eager for a tidbit of gossip he could pass on to the rest of the servants.

“How is the enquiry coming along...?”

He couldn’t quite get his mouth around *sir*, but his tone was conciliatory.

“Proceeding.”

Disappointed with his response, Burns pursed his lips.

“I’ll see if madam is at home.”

He was about to go slithering off when Murdoch stopped him.

“I wonder if you’d do me a favour and just announce me.”

The butler eyed him dubiously. “They won’t like it.”

“Tell them I insisted. You had no choice. I’ll vouch for you.”

Burns contemplated the pleasure of discomfiting his employer and the displeasure of the possible consequences. Pleasure won out.

“They’re in the sun room taking afternoon tea. I recommend you don’t linger. His honour doesn’t like to be interrupted.”

He led the way through the drawing room where Murdoch had previously met with Maud Pedlow. French doors opened onto the veranda, and here Burns gave a discreet tap and rather showily opened them.

“I beg your pardon, your honour, Mrs. Pedlow, Mr. Pedlow, but Detective Murdoch of number-four station wishes to speak to you.”

Give him his due, Burns did announcements particularly well.

Murdoch heard a querulous voice say, "Not now, Burns, what are you thinking of..." but he entered right at the butler's shoulder.

Judge Pedlow, napkin tucked into his collar, was in the midst of stuffing a cake into his mouth. The cream had squeezed out around his lips like rabid foam. Maud Pedlow was seated beside him and across from her was Henry Pedlow. He looked at Murdoch in dismay and immediately lowered his eyes. If he could have disappeared into the fruit bowl he would have, thought Murdoch. The judge scowled.

"This is very presumptuous, sir. What is your business?"

"I wouldn't dream of interrupting at such an important time, except that I'm investigating a serious case, your honour."

"Yes, what is it?"

Murdoch hesitated ostentatiously. Let them sweat.

"I'm particularly here to talk to Mrs. Pedlow."

"My wife! I don't understand. Why would you want to talk to my wife?"

Maud had obviously not told her husband about Murdoch's previous visit. Burns fiddled with the dishes on the sideboard, waiting to hear what was going on. Mrs. Pedlow regarded Murdoch the way Macbeth might have stared at Banquo's ghost.

"Madam, did you not inform his honour of my interview?"

She shook her head and dabbed at her mouth with one of the damask napkins.

"No, of course not. It could have no relevance to him."

She stood up so quickly she jolted the table. Walter's coffee splashed out of the cup.

"Mrs. Pedlow, if you please!"

"I'm sorry, Walter. I think it would be better if Mr. Murdoch and I met in another room. We don't want to

interfere with your tea."

The judge was not entirely a fool. He regarded her curiously. "Please sit down, my dear. If one of our police officers deems it necessary to come to my own house on official business I'd like to know what it is. Consider my position," he added ambiguously.

Maud sank back into her seat. Henry Pedlow was sitting very still and neither he nor his aunt looked at each other. Walter wiped off most of the cream custard from his mouth and decided to be gracious.

"I can spare some time, Mr.-er-Merton. Fortunately we are having a cold meal today."

"I'm glad of that, sir."

Pedlow glanced up sharply but Murdoch had kept his face expressionless.

"Burns, bring Mr. Murdoch a chair," said Maud.

The butler pulled a cane-back chair closer to the table. Murdoch placed his hat beside him on the floor and took out his notebook with some deliberation. Anything to intimidate these people.

"Bear with us, Henry, this won't take long," Pedlow said.

For the second time that day, Murdoch felt a surge of anger and the muscles in his neck tightened. The condescension in the judge's voice infuriated him. Pedlow might as well have been talking about a pauper begging for alms.

"I can't promise that, sir," he said. "I must take all the time necessary. I am investigating two murders."

"Two? What do you mean?" Maud gasped.

"Hold on, Mrs. Pedlow," said her husband. "I don't even know about one. Start at the beginning, Merton, if you please."

He waved at him to begin as if he were a lawyer at the bench. Murdoch flipped over a few pages in his notebook, trying to get back his own control. No sense in letting a blowfly like Pedlow get under his skin. He could also feel

how intently Henry Pedlow was paying attention and it aggravated him. His honour hadn't deemed it necessary to introduce his nephew to a detective so Henry was saved the embarrassment of having to admit a prior acquaintance. Murdoch didn't insist, deciding to keep that particular ace up his sleeve for now. Close up, the younger Pedlow wasn't as attractive as he'd first seemed on the stage with Annie. Even the brown skin couldn't mask the deep shadows underneath his eyes. Murdoch had an uncharitable feeling of satisfaction.

"Well? Get on with it," said the judge.

"A few days ago, I spoke to Mrs. Pedlow concerning the unnatural death of a woman named Dolly Shaw--"

"Why would my wife know anything of such a person?"

"Her daughter takes in washing," murmured Maud.

Murdoch saw no reason he should spare her. "I discovered Mrs. Pedlow's card in the dead woman's desk. There was also a copy of a letter that could be construed as a blackmail threat."

"How so?"

"The note mentioned previous services rendered which would be revealed unless a gratuity, her word, was tendered."

"Addressed to whom?"

"I don't know, sir, there was no name."

"And you say a copy. Am I to take that to mean you do not have the original?"

"That is correct, sir."

"Therefore, not only do you not know for whom this letter was intended, you do not know if it was actually sent, or when."

"You are right on all counts, sir."

"Aha." The judge sat back with the tips of his fingers forming a tent.

"I also found a large sum of money on the woman's person."

"How large?"

"Five hundred dollars. Ten fifty-dollar bills."

"You are, therefore, of the opinion she may have received this monies from her intended mark."

"It seems likely."

"But you have no proof."

"Not at the moment. One of the neighbours says that Mrs. Shaw used to be a midwife and she boasted about an album she had in which she kept her records. Records of sin, as she referred to them. I'm assuming, of course, she dealt with babies conceived out of wedlock. So far I have not found this book."

"I see. You trying to make a tidy package of everything, aren't you? Threatening letter, money, some kind of records. Your thinking is rather acute, I'll give you that, Merton. Except I don't know where some poor wretch of a shop clerk would get the amount of money you found."

"Doesn't have to be a shop girl, sir."

The judge considered his wife. "Were you acquainted with this woman, my dear?" He was now totally in his element. He'd reverted to the kindly judge demeanour.

"Of course not."

Henry spoke for the first time. "Really, Uncle, how could she be?"

Pedlow ignored him, but Murdoch knew that both of them, detective and judge, had registered the intensity of Henry Pedlow's intervention.

"How did the woman come by your card?" Walter asked his wife.

"I don't know, I truly don't. One of the servants stole it probably. When I was visiting somebody. Passed it on to her."

"For what purpose?"

"Please, Walter, you are making me feel as if I'm on the witness stand." Maud tried unsuccessfully to laugh.

“Uncle! I must add my protest. We are not in court. My poor aunt is about to melt in a puddle in the heat of all these questions.”

Henry was right about Maud’s state and Pedlow frowned. “I am so sorry, my dear, I got quite carried away.” He settled a pince-nez on his nose and glared at Murdoch. “Do you see what happens when decent people are intruded upon in this manner?”

“My apologies, Mrs. Pedlow.”

“*You* are only doing your duty, sir.”

The implied reproach was not lost on her husband and it seemed to incite him the way fear in a mouse will incite a terrier. He pounced.

“Am I to understand, Mrs. Pedlow, that you have received no begging letter or threatening letter from this woman?”

“No, of course not.”

He turned to Murdoch. “You said Mrs. Pedlow’s visiting card was the only one you found on the woman’s premises?”

“That’s right.”

“How did the wretched woman die?”

“She was suffocated, sir. With a pillow from her couch. It is possible she was then dragged to the hearth and her head was banged against the fender.”

“I see. So we are most likely looking for a person with physical strength, a man no doubt.”

“I wish I could be that definite, your honour. As I said, it is possible this is what happened. The physician couldn’t in fact say when the blow to her head had occurred. Mrs. Shaw may have fallen on the fender before she was suffocated and her murderer took advantage of the moment.”

Pedlow sniffed, aware he’d fallen into some kind of trap.

“Let us rest this case for a moment. You said there were two deaths?”

"Yesterday evening the body of Mrs. Shaw's foster son George Tucker was found stabbed to death."

"But he's a boy..."

"So he is, ma'am."

"Was he a boy?" the judge asked.

"He was twelve or thirteen."

"Any suspects?"

"Not exactly. Dolly Shaw's daughter, a grown woman, has run off and there is another foster child, who has also disappeared."

"Sounds like they're your culprits," interjected Henry. "Partners in crime."

Once again Murdoch was struck by how rigid the man was. He was sitting forward in his chair as if he had a stick up his backside.

"Let's not jump to conclusions, Henry. If Mr. Merton was sure of that, it's not likely he'd be here trespassing on our tea time is it?"

"That's correct, your honour. We haven't arrested anybody yet. But this morning, I made another search of the house and I found this piece of newspaper." He took it out of his pocket and handed it to Maud. "As you can see, ma'am, it is a photograph of your nephew's recent reception."

Quick as a snake, Walter intercepted the paper. "What do you think is the significance of that, Merton?"

"My name's Murdoch, sir. Acting Detective William Murdoch. And I was hoping Mrs. Pedlow might be able to enlighten me."

Maud's hand was fluttering around her cheek. "I'm afraid not. It's most strange."

"Well, at the risk of my uncle reprimanding me for hasty conclusions," interjected Henry, "I'd say you already have two good suspects. Who knows why they bothered to save this photograph?" He smiled. "I didn't realize I was so celebrated. But truly, Officer, why would the daughter disappear unless she had a guilty conscience?"

Walter couldn't resist the opportunity.

"You wouldn't have made a good lawyer, Henry. Never assume. There are many reasons the woman might have run off. Fear for one. I've known many an innocent party act so guilty they might as well have placed the rope around their own necks. All from fear."

There was something about the way he said the word that turned Murdoch's stomach. Relish. An almost lascivious delight in his own power and the helplessness of the victims. He turned his attention back to Maud.

"I take it you can't help with this matter, ma'am? You have never met the boy, George, or his foster brother?"

"Objection, Murdoch. She has already said she did not know the woman so she is not likely to have met the boys."

"With respect, your honour, the one does not necessarily preclude the other."

"Got you there, Uncle." Henry Pedlow was still trying rather desperately to inject a note of levity into the situation. Pedlow frowned at his wife. The kindly judge demeanour had vanished like a winter sunshine.

"Come now, answer his question, Mrs. Pedlow. Did you ever meet a boy named George...what?"

"George Tucker, your honour," Murdoch answered. "The other boy is named Alfred Locke."

"No. Never. Not at all...I'm sorry."

"You don't know of them, do you, sir?" asked Murdoch.

"Have they been up in front of my bench do you mean?"

"That as well."

"No, can't recall. But I will ask my clerk to check the records. This is most unpleasant. Perhaps this woman Dolly Shaw was planning to harm me. You never know how warped some people's minds can get if they feel they have suffered an injustice. The daughter is at large and might be insane for all we know."

Pedlow looked worried and Murdoch wondered if he'd received threats before. He wouldn't be surprised, given his

notoriously harsh sentences.

"I want you to pursue this vigorously, Murdoch."

"I have every intention, sir."

Pedlow scrutinized him. "Have we met before? Have you ever been before my bench?"

"Yes, I have. I was a witness in the Jimmy Mashuter case."

"I don't recall..."

"He stole some gloves. It was wintertime and he had frostbite in four fingers. He was a child of the streets, no parents worthy of the name. You sent him to the penitentiary for three years."

Pedlow flapped his hand in Murdoch's direction. "I detect criticism in your voice, Mr. Murdoch, but in all my years on the bench I have been steadfastly of the opinion that firm measures in the beginning will save the criminal and society itself later transgressions."

"The boy was placed among hardened criminals, sir. He hanged himself shortly after he arrived at the prison."

Pedlow shrugged. "Obviously of a weak character. Wouldn't have amounted to much." He reached over and patted his wife's hand. "Now don't think too harshly of me, Mrs. Pedlow. These are the difficult decisions I face every day. You have no idea how burdensome they feel sometimes."

Murdoch stood up abruptly. "Thank you for your time."

Pedlow snapped his fingers at the butler, who had been watching the proceedings with frank curiosity.

"Burns, see Mr. Murdoch out if you please."

As he stood up, Murdoch addressed Henry Pedlow.

"We've met before, I believe, sir."

"Where?" asked his uncle.

Henry contrived to appear embarrassed. "In truth it was at a tavern, was it not, Mr. Murdoch?"

"Why didn't you say so?"

"It didn't seem necessary, Uncle."

“What tavern?”

“I don’t recall. I sometimes enjoy rubbing shoulders with the working classes. Gives me a perspective on life, as it were.”

Walter considered him, clearly not conned. However, he chose not to pursue the matter. Murdoch saw the decision and knew it was not made from affection or concern for Henry. He wouldn’t invite the possibility of shit being revealed in front of the detective. Murdoch felt a decidedly unchristian desire for the entire Pedlow family to be humbled. He was actually contemplating ways and means when he realized Pedlow was talking to him.

“I’m sure the malefactor will appear in front of me before long, eh, Murdoch? We’ll throw the book at him.”

“Perhaps the circumstances will dictate that, sir. And we don’t know for sure. The malefactor might be a woman. And that changes everything, doesn’t it?”

Surprisingly Pedlow didn’t take offence.

“Not in my court it doesn’t. Doesn’t matter to me what’s under their clothes. Pegs or holes makes no difference.”

CHAPTER TWENTY



The bathroom at the Yeoman Club was luxuriously appointed. The water closet was of mahogany and porcelain, the faucets solid brass, the towels of satin damask. Annie, mother naked, was washing herself out with a rubber douche. Fenton was most particular about using French letters, but tonight he'd been too full, too lazy to use one. In fact, Annie had manoeuvred this state of affairs, pretending an urgency of desire she did not at all feel. She had her scheme well planned and it needed to be plausible. In two or three weeks she would approach him with anxious sighs, a tear unbidden. Then a little later, a frightened confirmation. If necessary she was quite prepared to escalate to hysterical scenes. She knew there was no chance of Fenton marrying her. He was a man of high aspirations. Next year he intended to run for alderman, and however cunt-struck he might be presently she doubted he could be pushed into such an unsuitable marriage. She'd read in the *News* that he had been paying court to the young daughter of one of his partners. So much the better. More reason for him to want Annie's silence. Besides, she didn't really want to marry. Not yet. In spite of the vulgarity of the Derby she liked the life, the attention, the feeling she had on good nights that she held them captive. Even the drunkest sot was silent when she sang "Home Sweet Home."

She winced at the cool water. No, a handsome settlement for pain and suffering would be enough. She'd slip out of Fenton's life, let him know discreetly that their

problem had been solved and put the money away. She'd played out this script twice already with different men.

Annie finished what she was doing, put the douche back in its case, and started to get dressed. She studied herself in the mirror and frowned at her reflection. I'm getting as bad as Millie. Can't lose my looks just yet. She pinched her cheeks to make them glow. She pulled a face at herself, a bit saucy but innocent. Promise of fun, naughty fun. A little lowering of the chin, raising of her eyes, they all liked that. When you give me your look, said Fenton, I grow erect at once.

She got sick of them sometimes. The knee tremblers, the flyers, the back scuttlers. All for what? Less than a minute's worth of tickle and sneeze. But her savings in the Dominion Bank on King Street were growing. When she had enough money she intended to buy her own business and then she could afford to pick and choose her own man, if she wanted one at all. She'd even look after Millie and her brat if Meredith got stubborn.

She breathed in and hooked up her corset. Her dress smelled of sweat and cigar smoke. She would have liked to have worn fresh clothes but she'd come directly from the Derby to the rendezvous with Fenton, who was presently snoring and snuffing in the bed. He'd been too drunk to remember to leave money but she had no compunction about dipping into the pocket of his trousers where he'd stuffed his bill folder. She took out two ten-dollar bills and put them into her chatelaine, snapping it closed with more anger than she realized. There was no sound outside in the hall. Everybody was asleep, the waiters gone. Tonight she was glad to be leaving so late. She felt as if her nerves were at the surface of her skin, and the contemptuous glances she usually elicited would burn.

Millie pushed the quilt off her legs. Her pregnancy made her hot all the time. She was half-asleep, uncomfortable with the heartburn she had suffered from for the last week. She heard the front door open softly and a light tread across the threshold. Quickly, she turned to face the wall, not wanting Annie to know she was awake. Her sister was often full when she came in, and she stank of cigars and another smell that Millie didn't want to identify. Better not to be awake.

Last night, she'd denied her sister, ignoring the whispered plea.

"Millie, are you asleep? Millie?"

Annie was quite capable of shaking her roughly awake if she wanted to and this soft, plaintive whisper frightened her more than any anger could have. But she hadn't responded and Annie had gone into the kitchen, where she had started to cry. Why was she mithering, thought Millie resentfully. She wasn't the one with her apron up.

The floorboard creaked again. Annie was being uncommonly quiet. Probably so sozzled she couldn't walk straight. Again a footstep. She suddenly smelled something pungent. She started to turn. "Annie, what—"

A knee was pressed against her back forcing her into the bed. One hand pushed her head into the pillow, the other jammed a cloth against her nose and mouth. There was something on the cloth, sickeningly sweet but stinging at the same time. It invaded her nose and throat, choking her. She couldn't move from the weight pinning her down, couldn't scream, couldn't breathe.

Dark red clouds wrapped around her, pulling her downward, paralyzing her limbs so she could no longer struggle, only sink into a fast-moving river of unconsciousness.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE



In a sudden change of weather, Friday was wet and cool. Murdoch was still feeling chilled from his damp morning ride and downing two mugs of enamel-destroying tea hadn't helped that much. The grey light, the patter of the rain on the window, the memories that had been stirred yesterday were lowering his spirits. Usually, the worn furniture in his cubicle was comfortably familiar but this morning it looked shabby and second-rate. He was glad when he heard Crabtree's solid tread in the hall. The constable stepped into the cubicle.

"There's a telephone call for you, sir. A Mr. Bright. Says he's a druggist."

Murdoch jumped up and followed him back to the main room of the station where the telephone was situated. The young duty officer glanced at him curiously. Telephone calls were few and far between.

"Murdoch here."

Mr. Bright wasn't used to his new instrument yet, and he spoke at top volume.

"I did some tests on those pills you gave me...can you hear me?"

"Indeed I can, sir. In fact you can speak a little softer if you like."

"Oh, right! The wife says I bellow into this dratted thing." He obviously moved further away from the mouthpiece because Murdoch could now hardly make out what he was saying. "How's that?"

"Somewhere in the middle would be perfect, sir."

This time he got it right but began to speak in a slower than normal voice. "Nothing in there that shouldn't be. Iron from the beef blood, some wheat for filler. They won't hurt you any if you take them in moderation."

"And if you don't? Take them in moderation, I mean?"

The druggist chuckled. "They won't kill you but they'll bind you up something terrible. You won't be able to pass out a pea. They'll likely give you bad piles too."

"I see. Thank you, Mr. Bright. I appreciate your help."

"Not at all. Just take two tablespoons of fig syrup oil morning and night 'til you're regular."

Murdoch realized the druggist thought the pills belonged to him and that he was too embarrassed to admit to it.

They hung up. Crabtree was standing at the counter that divided the room. Murdoch was aware suddenly that the big man seemed to take every opportunity to remain standing. He walked over to him.

"Crabtree, a word in your ear."

He whispered his question so none of the other constables could hear. Crabtree flushed but he nodded.

"Yes, sir. For almost two weeks."

Murdoch asked him another question and again he nodded, shamefaced.

"Quite painful if the truth be told, sir."

Murdoch passed on the druggist's recommendation.

"You can get the stuff at—"

Suddenly the outer door slammed open. The young woman who burst in was dressed in startlingly garish and indecorous clothes. A couple of old men who had come to complain about each other stared open-mouthed, and the constables at the duty desk lit up with excitement. Annie Brogan was in her stage costume.

She saw Murdoch and came over to him.

"I need to talk to you. In private." Her previously flirtatious manner had quite vanished and she seemed oblivious of the leering men.

"Of course. This way, please." He paused. Annie looked quite exhausted. "Can I get you a cup of tea?" he added.

A strange expression crossed her face and Murdoch didn't realize at first that she had forced back tears.

"Thank you. That's kind. I could do with one."

"I'll bring it in, sir," said Crabtree.

Murdoch ushered Annie through the passageway to his cubicle.

"You'll have to not mind my clothes. I haven't had a chance to change since I did my show."

"What's the matter?"

"I've been with my sister at the general hospital for the last eight hours." She bit her lip. "I thought I'd lost her."

They were interrupted by Crabtree with a mug of tea. She took it and managed a vestige of her old smile. She gulped some down.

"Ouch! It's hot." But she drank some more, greedily. Murdoch waited. She drained back the tea, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand. She'd rubbed away most of the colouring from her eyelids and she seemed more vulnerable, younger even.

"I'll get to the point. Last night, about one o'clock, somebody came into my house and drugged my sister, Mildred—"

"Drugged?"

"Chloroform. I didn't get home until almost two." She glanced away from him. "I was dining with a friend of mine. I keep late hours. Anyway when I came in, there was Millie half on the bed and half on the floor." She paused, struggling for self-control. "She was so white and still, I thought she was dead. Thanks be to God, she's not. I managed to get her sitting up and she started to come around."

In fact, Annie had stuck her fingers down Millie's throat until she vomited all over both of them.

"What happened?"

"She doesn't know. All she remembers is hearing somebody come into the room-thought it was me and didn't want to admit she was awake, nocky bint. Then this stinking cloth was over her face. It was chloroform for sure. She still reeked of it."

"Any idea who did it?"

"Could I have another cuppa char, Mr. Murdoch? I'm parched."

"I'll get you one in a minute." He knew she was stalling and he didn't want to lose her. "Is your sister all right now?"

Annie looked away again. "Yes. Millie wasn't forced or anything like that. She'll live."

"So who was it?" he repeated. "What did they want?"

"Who I don't know. Why is probably to take something of mine."

"What?"

She retreated, sipped the last of her tea, then came back to her resolve.

"A book. An album-this is the truth now and I don't care if it gets me into trouble. It was me your man saw going into Dolly's house the night she was stiffened-and I didn't do it so get that out of your mind."

"It wasn't in."

"Yes, well. You were right, I went there to get something for Millie. I knew Dolly from before, and she would give you stuff like that. For a price of course. A high price."

"And did she?"

"Yes." She hesitated, trying to step on the stones and not in the quicksand. She intended to tell Murdoch only what suited her. "I bought what I came for, but she took out this autograph album. It was pretty, blue leather and gold letters. When her back was turned I nicked it."

"And somebody came to your house, almost killed your sister, and stole this book and nothing else?"

"Yes."

“Why? Why would they go to the trouble of chloroforming a woman for an album, however gold the letters? You can go to a fancy goods store on King Street and buy a dozen. You can order them from Sears catalogue. This is a bit extreme wouldn’t you say?”

She shrugged. “People are mad as mice sometimes. I can’t explain what’s in the klep’s mind.”

“Annie, come on. This is horse plop, as you call it.”

Annie began to play with a thread on her skirt. In another situation she would have turned it into something coy but now she just looked like a child trying to find a way out of trouble.

“Miss Brogan! Annie! Look at me! I’m real sorry for what happened to your sister, but I can’t do anything about it unless you stop giving me the runaround. Besides, I happen to know what was special about that album.”

“You do, do you?”

“Dolly Shaw told her neighbour that it was her record book. She called it a record of the sins of the world.”

Annie scowled. “Did she now?”

“What was in it really?”

“I suppose you could call it that, I wouldn’t. There’s lots of girls get caught. And they’re the ones who pay, not the gassers.” Her voice was bitter. “Dolly Shaw never asked questions. She was a good midwife, mind you, but it was discretion you paid the muck for. And it’s true. She did write everything in her sodding album. Names and dates. I saw her.”

“When was that?”

“Doesn’t matter. A long time ago.”

“Did Dolly try to put the squeeze on you? Some dosh in exchange for silence?”

“You have to be pulling it. I’m already a Jezebel in the eyes of the world. Who’d care if there were more dilberries to be seen on my arse?”

“You are mentioned, though?”

"I didn't say so."

"Why'd you steal the book, then?"

"I had my reasons, but they don't concern you."

"They might."

"I wasn't planning to put the touch on the poor tits who fell into her clutches, if that's what you're worried about."

"I wasn't."

Annie stared at him, trying to read his expression, then she said, "All right. What else do you want to know?"

"Who knew the album was in your possession?"

"I don't know. My sister saw it but that's all."

"Was Dolly aware you'd nicked it?"

Annie laughed. "She wasn't dead yet. She had to know, seeing she was clutching it to her bosom when we had our dustup. I snatched it out from her."

"This is the truth now? You had a quarrel?"

"That's it."

"What about?"

"It's not relevant."

Murdoch let that go, trying to play the line gently.

"Somebody must have come soon after you left. Dolly might have told them you had the book."

"Hey, do I hear right? What you just said could be construed as a belief in my innocence."

"That's my assumption at the moment."

She grinned again. "When you come to the Derby and said she was dead, I thought I was the one as killed her. She fell down, you see, when I grabbed the book. She was drunk to her top knot. I could hear her moaning when I left so I was pretty certain she was still quick, but you gave me a heart-stopper for a minute. It was a great relief to me that the old sod was suffocated, God forgive me."

"Did she hit her head on the fender when she fell?"

"No. She sort of staggered backwards and sat on her behind against her desk. She wasn't near the hearth at all."

"How long were you in the house, would you say?"

"Not long. Must have been with her for half an hour at the most."

"Which way did you go when you left?"

"Straight down River Street. I picked up a cabbie on Queen Street. You can get his docket. Old guy, name of Aloysius. Horse was a dapple."

"What were you and Mrs. Shaw arguing about?"

"Nothing in particular. Dolly was very nasty when she had a skin on."

"How much did you pay for the abortifacient?"

She grimaced. "As it turned out, I didn't pay anything. We had the barney and I grabbed the album and ran, taking my money with me. She'd given me the herbs already. Wasn't stealing; she owed me."

"Miss Brogan, I found a copy of a letter in her desk that was asking for money. It wasn't addressed. Will you swear to me Dolly Shaw didn't send you that letter?"

"I swear. Besides, she wasn't so thick as to think she'd get much dosh from me."

Murdoch believed her but he wasn't going to let her off so easily just yet. He regarded her sombrely.

"It is obviously to your benefit if we find her murderer soon. Somebody is willing to take extraordinary risks to get the information in that book."

"Well, they've got what they want now."

"But this person must believe you have that knowledge as well. They might want to erase it. Make sure it dies with you."

"You'd better find them then."

"Come clean and give me a chance to."

Annie sat silently for what seemed like a long time. She glanced around at the cracked walls, the dingy chair, and filing cabinet. She waved away a persistent fly. Murdoch sat as patiently as he could. Finally, she said, "I want you to find who attacked Millie. She didn't deserve it...the chloroform caused her to miscarry."

Murdoch pulled out his handkerchief and gave it to her.

"It's funny," Annie continued. "You wish and pray that the thing inside you won't live, but when it doesn't, you feel very bad."

She blew her nose indelicately and rubbed at the tears. Looking very sad, she said, "If I tell you my own wicked story, are you certain it will be of help?"

"It might."

"Here goes then." She raised her hand in a mock toast. "When I was young and foolish." She smiled slightly. "We all do something foolish when we're young, don't we, Mr. Murdoch?"

"Certainly." He didn't consider her exactly old now but he didn't say anything.

"I had a lover. A wonderful, handsome prince. My Othello. I was only seventeen, and like Desdemona I loved him for the tales he told. He promised to marry me, the usual malarkey to get what he wanted. I got one in the oven pretty fast, and lo, my adoring lover wasn't quite so adoring. He'd neglected to mention a wife and family pining for him somewhere in America. He gave me enough money to get by, sent me off to Dolly's, and slipped away into the night. I went to lie in at her house in Markham, and on February the fourth, in the early hours of the morning, I was delivered of a baby boy." She stopped and tipped her empty cup, trying to find sustenance in it. "I was just starting on the stage and I couldn't raise a nipper on my own, so Dolly arranged for the baby to go to a farmer's family in the village. I only saw him once, never even held him in my arms. Dolly wouldn't let me." Unconsciously, she placed her hand at her bosom. "I had to promise I would make payments every month, two dollars for the child's maintenance. My baby wasn't easy to place, you see. Dolly said nobody would take him unless I agreed to pay regularly. Coming up with the muck was hard but I did it. Sent her money faithfully. For eight years. When I went to see her for Millie, I asked how the boy was doing.

I'd been thinking for a long time that I'd like to visit him. Incognito of course—I didn't want to disturb his life, which I hoped was a happy one."

Annie stared into her tea cup as if she could read her own fortune in the dregs. "I mentioned this to Dolly and asked her if I could have the name of the family that took him. She sneered at me. 'Oh dear,' said she. 'Didn't I tell you? He's dead and gone to heaven. Sickly little thing he was, didn't live out the winter.' Well that was a shocker, I tell you. 'What about the money?' I said. 'What money? You haven't been sending any money.' 'Yes, I have.' 'Prove it,' she said. 'There's no record.' I knew she wrote everything down in that album because I'd seen her do it when I was at the farm. She took it out of the desk and waved it under my nose. 'I owe you four dollars,' she said. 'I'll take it off your bill.'

"I was in a rage, Mr. Murdoch. That she'd cheated me for all these years. Once she'd even asked for extra because she said the boy had the measles and needed to see a doctor. I went without and sent the money. Always thinking I was helping. You see, I hoped one day he'd know that his... that his mother had cared. That I'd done my best. Dolly was chortling away. I screamed at her and snatched up the bloody album. I dunno, I wanted to see for myself if it was true. I wanted names." She twisted the handkerchief into a knot. "When I got home I was like a frigging green girl. I got all trembly, couldn't bear to open the shicey thing. I stuffed it in the drawer...and now I'll never know for sure if my boy is alive."

Murdoch felt compassion for her but he had to tighten the line, bring her in. He opened his file and showed her the calling card and the piece of newspaper.

"Tell me the truth, Annie. Was Mrs. Pedlow a customer of Dolly's?"

She took the card, staring at it. At the neat black script. The respectable name.

"That wasn't what she called herself then. She was known as Mrs. Brown. But she was there at the same time as me. She delivered two weeks before I did."

"What happened to her baby? Was it adopted?"

"Not as far as I know. But everything to do with Mrs. Brown was so hush-hush. There was a wet-nurse came in from the village for a few days and Missus left soon after with her infant. A girl it was."

"There's a child living with her now but she's supposedly the Pedlows' ward."

Annie nodded. "I know. When I went up there, I asked her and she told me the first infant died."

"Do you believe her?"

"I don't know. Maybe it's true."

"She was a respectable married woman, why would she have to hide her pregnancy?"

"Come on, Mr. Murdoch. Don't be nocky. People can count, you know. Maybe her husband was away at an inconvenient time. Or maybe he couldn't get his pecker up. He'd know whether he was the baker or not."

"If he wasn't the father she'd have to make up some story as to why she had an infant in tow."

"That's it."

"Did Maud Pedlow know you'd been to see Dolly?"

"Yes, I told her."

Agitated, Annie stood up although there was nowhere to pace in the tiny office. "I told her everything. Not about taking the album but what Dolly had said about my boy being dead. I needed to tell somebody. There wasn't anybody else to talk to. Even Millie doesn't know."

Murdoch hesitated, almost afraid of what he had to say.

"Annie, when I went to interview Mrs. Pedlow yesterday, I told her that Dolly's record book was missing. Her husband and her nephew were both present."

"I see." Unexpectedly, she touched his arm. "Wasn't your fault. You didn't know. But it must have been one of

them, or a messenger for one of them."

"Looks that way."

She slammed her fist on his desk.

"This cull, the nephew? The one who's been licking his chops around my diddies—is he the one who came after Millie?"

"It's possible."

"That's a big favour to do for your auntie. Almost murder somebody so she can sleep at night. You know what I think, Mr. Murdoch? I'm thinking the frigging nephew is the real baker. The one who stuck my lady high and mighty. She wouldn't want that little secret in the papers, would she?"

Murdoch remembered the scene at the Pedlows'. The intensity of Henry's response. He had the feeling Annie was right. And if Henry had chloroformed Millie, he might have gone for Dolly. Same reason.

"If it's true, would Dolly have known it?"

"She knew everything. Most of the girls lied, about being married mostly. Whenever one of them went into the village, she'd go through their belongings. I caught her red-handed one day. She didn't care. 'I have to protect myself,' she said. I'd bet my life she did the same for Missus."

Again Murdoch hesitated. She was eyeing him curiously.

"What's up?" she asked.

"Why did you say the child you bore was hard to place?"

"What?"

He repeated the question.

She looked defiant. "He wasn't deformed or sick or anything like that. I was clean."

"Why then?"

"Dolly hammered it home to me. Nobody's going to want this by-blow unless you pay. Then they might."

She raised her head and smiled. There was fondness in the smile. "His father was strong and handsome as ever you saw, but he was a coloured man."

Before he could continue, they heard Crabtree hurrying down the hall. He parted the reed strips.

"There's a lad out here, sir. Says he saw young Freddie going into the Shaw house."

"When?"

"Just now. He knew as we were looking for the laddie and he ran right here."

Murdoch pushed back his chair. "I've got to leave. Crabtree, go make sure the messenger doesn't escape."

Murdoch waited until the constable was out of earshot.

"Miss Brogan, I'd like you to come with me."

"Me? Why?"

"I don't want to raise false hopes but I believe Dolly was lying to you."

"How d'you mean?"

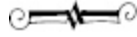
"There's a foster son who's been living with her. He's about eight years of age and he's part coloured."

She gasped and a look of such joy came into her face that he could have wept.

"Do you want to come with me? If he is your son, he needs your help bad."

All she could do was to nod her agreement.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO



A gangly youth was out in the public area. He was wearing a tight navy sweater and check bicycle trousers, nipped at the knee. A scorcher if ever there was one. His face was streaked with rain, and he smelled of damp wool.

"You told the constable you've seen the boy we're looking for. Tell me," said Murdoch but Annie Brogan was at his elbow and, seeing her, the young man looked as if he wasn't going to utter words again.

"What's your name, son?" Murdoch asked him.

"Jim McEvoy, Junior, sir. I live at number one-twenty-eight, just down the road from Mrs. Shaw." He paused. "Er, the late Mrs. Shaw that is—you know the one who—"

"Yes, I know. Pay attention to the business at hand, Mr. McEvoy. Where did you see him?"

"He was sneaking into his house. I was out on my wheel. I deliver things about town, you see, sir. They've got a bit of a garden out back. For a minute I thought it was a lost dog or something like that, 'cos he was creeping close to the fence. I took a study because if it was there, might be a reward involved—"

"Get on with it, lad, you're trying my patience."

The youth flushed and Murdoch felt sorry he'd been so abrupt with him.

"When I realized it was Fred I just jumped on my wheel and came here as fast as I could."

Murdoch turned to the constable.

"Crabtree, I'm going right over there. I'll use my bicycle. Miss Brogan is coming too. Bring her along with you."

Annie caught hold of Murdoch's sleeve. "Please! I must get there as fast as I can. Let me come with you."

Her boots were of soft kid with a needle toe and higher heel. They didn't look the best footwear for a hurried walk but he understood her urgency.

"Can you ride a bicycle?" he asked.

"Yes. I've used one in my act."

Murdoch turned to the youth. "McEvoy, I've just requisitioned your wheel in the service of the police."

The boy blushed with delight. "My pleasure, sir, er, madam."

"You can come with the constable. Miss Brogan, let's scorch."

Annie, not caring, folded her skirts up and tucked them into her belt. She handled the wheel like a professional, and they got to the Shaw house in minutes. Fortunately, no curiosity had yet been excited and the street was deserted. Murdoch was praying that Freddie hadn't been alarmed and fled again. He signalled to Annie to dismount at the opposite corner. The rain was glistening on the macadam, sleeting through the drooping leaves of the trees.

"Do you mind the wet?"

She shook her head. She would have stood in fire and brimstone if necessary.

"It'd be better if you wait here, then. I'm going in the back way and you'll be able to see if he shoots out the front. If he does, grab him and yell for me. He's a little titch. You can hold on to him if you have to."

She nodded and he knew that she would risk her life at this point if she had to.

He crossed the road and walked casually in front of the house. There was no sign of anyone stirring, the curtains in the front parlour were still drawn tight. He went through the gate and walked around to the rear garden. The plot was

given over to vegetables and well tended. Tomatoes were ripening on the vine, and there were several rows of potatoes and turnips. In the sunlight, the garden would have appeared lush and fertile, now it seemed desolate, the colour washed out by the rain.

When he had finished searching the house previously, he'd barred the back door from the inside and locked the front. Freddie had been forced to climb through the kitchen window. He'd trampled in the earth. The sash was pushed up and the sill muddy.

Murdoch leaned his head in first, cautiously. The window opened directly into the kitchen, where George had died. Murdoch stood still, trying to determine if he could detect the boy's presence, but the house remained quiet, as if it were holding its breath. He put his leg over the sill, scrunched his body, and slithered with some difficulty into the kitchen. Here he waited again. Nothing, except now he could hear the tick of a clock on the mantel. The heel of the loaf of bread was green with mould, and on the floor was a half-eaten unripe tomato. The cupboard door had swung wide open and he wondered if Freddie had come here in search of food.

He walked through into the hall.

"Hello! Anybody here? Freddie? It's Detective Murdoch. I'm not going to hurt you. Just come out. We've got to have a talk."

Silence.

He could see the door to the parlour was open. He went to investigate but that room was also empty.

He returned to the hall, which was uncarpeted, and thumped his feet a couple of times as if he were walking. He closed the creaky door to the kitchen with a bang. Then he lowered himself to the floor and leaned against the wall. When he'd gone into the fields as a boy, he'd found the best way to see the wild deer or rabbits was to sit still and wait.

He hoped Crabtree hadn't arrived yet and that Annie could hold out.

He'd been sitting for almost ten minutes when he was rewarded by a tiny sound, just the merest scrabble. Murdoch didn't stir. The noise had come from down the hall and he saw there was a cupboard underneath the stairs, the door open the slightest crack. He heard the scratching sound again but it lasted longer this time. The cupboard door shifted an inch wider and Freddie's dirty face appeared.

At first he didn't see Murdoch because of the gloom in the hall and he came out, crawling on all fours. At that instant the front door opened and Annie Brogan entered. Murdoch could see Crabtree standing behind her.

Freddie saw them all, whimpered, and made a dash for the stairs. Murdoch jumped up.

"Freddie, stop! Freddie!"

He charged after the boy and got to the top of the stairs as the boy raced into the bedroom on the left, slamming the door behind him. Annie also ran up the stairs. She halted on the landing. "I had to come in," she gasped. "I couldn't bear the wait any longer."

"Stay there," he said and slowly opened the door. For a moment it seemed as if the boy had vanished into thin air. The tiny bare room seemed completely empty. Murdoch held his breath to listen, but Freddie was unable to control his own panting. He was under the bed. Murdoch crouched down and found himself staring into one of the most terrified faces he had ever seen.

He got low to the floor and lay on his side, propped on his elbow, the way he had when he'd watched a fox's den.

"Don't be afraid, lad. I'm here to help you."

Freddie shrank back further against the wall. Suddenly there was a scuffling sound and Annie plunged to the floor as well, not caring about dirtying her dress or the inelegance of her position. She peered at the boy, winced, and said softly, very softly, "My God, it is him. He's the

spitting image.” She almost broke into a sob but she held it back. “Freddie, please come out. I’m Annie Brogan and I do believe we’ve met before, a long time ago.”

Murdoch was sitting on the chair by the door, while Annie, lying on her side, talked to Freddie. Her tone was as casual as if they were across a tablecloth at a picnic, although the boy was clad in only his nightshirt. Annie’s dress was dark from the rain and her hair was bedraggled and falling down at her neck.

“You must be starving,” she said. “I know what that’s like. I used to be hungry a lot when I was a nipper. Do you want to come out and we’ll get some good grub?” No answer. “I wouldn’t mind some sausages and mash. I know a nice eating house just down on Queen Street. Not too far away. What d’you say?” Silence. Murdoch began to wonder if they were going to have to drag him out. Then he remembered the Cupid’s Whispers he’d bought from Mr. Bright. He fished the tin out of his inside pocket, removed the lid, crouched down, and held them out to Annie. They were dipped in powdered sugar and smelled pleasantly fruity.

“Want one?”

She glanced at him in surprise, realized what he was doing, and smiled in delight.

“Sure would.” She popped one in her mouth and made a great show of enjoying it, licking her lips. Murdoch took one himself, got down to floor level and held out the tin to Freddie.

“Would you like one?”

Annie made more tasting sounds. “Can I have another?”

She took one. Murdoch waited. Then he put the tin on the floor and pushed it towards Freddie. He could see the boy’s wide staring eyes, how thin his face had become. Suddenly, Freddie grabbed a handful of the lozenges and

stuffed them in his mouth. There wasn't going to be a problem with unpleasant breath among any of them. The air beneath the bed was fragrant with the smell of raspberries.

"I know you're frightened, lad," said Murdoch. "But I promise we'll listen to your story fair and square. If you haven't done anything bad you won't be punished."

He saw the boy blink away a rush of tears. Then Freddie looked at Annie and said in a whisper, "What you mean you met me before?"

Annie slid further along the floor and stretched herself out. "I'm getting such a crick in my neck. Tell you what. If you come out from under there and sit on a chair beside me, I'll explain. And it's absolutely true what I said, on my honour. You look just like your father. And him and me knew each other well."

It was clear that Freddie was figuring it out. "Mrs. Mother said my real ma died from drink. She was a tart."

Annie swallowed hard. "She was lying, Freddie. On both counts. Listen, do you want to put your trousers on?"

He nodded and she got stiffly to her feet, grabbed the trousers, and pushed them towards the boy.

"I'm going to sit in this chair."

Murdoch stood up too and leaned against the door frame, ready to catch Freddie if he bolted. He sucked loudly on his lozenge. There was a scrambling sound from underneath the bed as Freddie struggled to dress. Then there was a tentative scratching noise and the boy's head emerged. He looked so worn and afraid that Murdoch wanted nothing more than to scoop him up and embrace him. However, he didn't move and neither did Annie. The boy squeezed himself out from under the bed but remained on all fours ready to scurry back at the first sign of trouble.

"Let's go down to the kitchen," said Murdoch. "I'll send Constable Crabtree off for some of those sausages and we can all have a talk."

Mutely, Freddie shook his head and looked as if he was about to retreat again. Quickly, Murdoch moved over, squatted down, and grasped hold of the boy's shoulder.

"You don't have any choice, lad."

Again Freddie shook his head. Annie spoke up.

"What I'm thinking, Mr. Murdoch, is that this house is a bad place to ask questions in. Is there anywhere else we can go to?"

Murdoch winced. Of course she was right. How could Freddie possibly sit in the kitchen where in all likelihood he'd last seen George bleeding away his life's blood.

"I think that's an excellent suggestion, Miss Brogan. Let's go across the road to that nice neighbour lady. See if she'd let us use her front parlour. Does that suit you, Freddie?"

He nodded. Murdoch hoped Mrs. Golding was still willing to be a Good Samaritan.

Annie held out her hand, and hesitantly Freddie took it. His head was lowered, every muscle poised ready to flee. Murdoch led the way out of the bedroom and into the landing. Crabtree was standing at the bottom of the stairs but he didn't speak. Freddie stopped in his tracks when he saw the uniform but Murdoch didn't give him a chance to run away. Calmly, he said to Crabtree, "Just go across to Mrs. Golding's, will you, Constable. Tell her we're coming over. There's three of us."

"Yes, sir."

At the bottom of the stairs they had to go past the kitchen, but Annie made sure she was between Freddie and the door and she kept on walking, holding his hand firmly in hers.

Three things stood out for Murdoch about the next hour. First was how politely Mrs. Golding hid her astonishment at the sight of Annie Brogan. Second was watching Freddie

gulp down the cold roast beef and bread like a starving dog. Almost immediately, he vomited it back all over the Goldings' best parlour rug. Mrs. Golding didn't make a murmur of reproach and on Annie's recommendation went to warm up some milk. The third memorable thing was Freddie's reaction to Murdoch's question.

"What happened, young lad? Who was it did in George? Can you tell me?"

Freddie was sitting close to Annie and he shuddered, put his head back, and wailed.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE



Once again, Lily had fled to her hiding place in the riverbank. Her dress had been splattered with George's blood. Panting, she'd pulled off the garment, tearing the shoulder seam in her haste, and immersed it in the cool water. In the darkness, the stains were difficult to see, but she rubbed at them as best she could, over and over until her knuckles were raw and skinned. Finally she draped the dress on the branches to dry and crept into the cave. She was clad only in her chemise and drawers and she couldn't stop the violent shivering. She curled up as tightly as she could and sat at the entrance, rocking back and forth. When the sun finally rose and brought a blessed warmth to the air, she stayed there, crying, but keeping the cries close to her.

She had returned to the house, circling back to what was familiar. She had entered through the back door into the kitchen, suddenly ravenous, searching for food. Saliva had filled her mouth and dribbled down the corner of her lips. There was a bag of buns on the table and she ate two immediately, almost choking on the dry, stale pastry. She sawed off a piece of bread from the loaf that the boys had left and chewed at the end of a piece of cheese. She had moved as carefully as she could but, without knowing it, she banged the pots on the stove as she looked for more food. The boys had awakened and George, with Freddie behind him, came down to the kitchen. He laughed when he saw her and immediately started to mock her, to jeer at her hunger. "You're going to get it," he mimed. "They're going

to throw you in jail for killing your mother. They're looking for you. You're in for it this time."

He pretended to put a rope around his neck, pull it tight, and dropped his head to one side, broken. "And your shit comes out," he said. He lifted his nightshirt and showed her how that happened, laughing all the time. Freddie had crouched in the corner of the room and he watched, frozen in dread, unable to help.

Perhaps none of that would have provoked her to murder, although she was so frightened. She would just have run away again. However, George knew what had happened before with the kidnapped baby, and eager for more cruelty he turned to that. He stuck his fingers in his mouth, pulling back his lips so they glistened raw and red. He held up his hand, the fingers glued together. He rocked the baby in his arms, making soothing gestures, but it was done to belittle her tenderness, to mock her love for the infant girl. Delighted at the reaction he had evoked in Lily, he pointed at her, cackling, tugging again at his mouth.

Then, sated in his fun, he turned to the cupboard, intending to get himself a mug or plate.

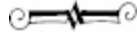
She seized the bread knife, ran around the table, and stabbed him. Once, twice, and again, while the hot blood shot out in an arc, drenching her.

She had lost any sense of how long she had been by the river. The way she had when she was in prison, she had taken herself into a trance, not moving, taking refuge in a world where she wasn't cold, where her mother and George were still alive, and where she was holding the baby again, caressing it, basking in the perfect smiles, the flawless hands.

She might have stayed there until she was discovered, but on the third morning a heavy rain began to fall, pocking the river, penetrating the opening of her den. Finally, not

even Lily could withstand the discomfort and cold. She uncurled herself. The pain in her limbs as the blood flowed again was excruciating. She had to stand up. She eased herself out of the cave and reluctantly stretched her arms. There was no colour in the world. The sky, the trees, the river were all leached of brightness. The rain was hitting her face and bare shoulders and arms, cold and punishing. She shook her head, trying to get away but she couldn't. Close by was her dress. It was as soaked as the ground, but it offered some comfort. She reached for it and as she did, the soft, muddy earth gave way and she slipped. Unable to gain her balance she fell into the deep pool where the river was dammed. Her wide drawers twisted around her legs. Momentarily a primitive panic seized her, an instinct for life. She gasped for air but she swallowed water instead. Choking, she drew it up her nose, down her throat, into her lungs. She thrashed frantically but to no avail. The river was overpowering her. Perhaps another person would have fought harder, been able to free herself. Lily's struggles were soon only halfhearted. She had so little to come back to life for.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR



Murdoch didn't bother with even rudimentary politeness when Burns opened the door.

"Where is Mrs. Pedlow? I have to see her immediately."

"She's in the drawing room, but--"

Murdoch pushed by him, leaving the butler spluttering a protest.

Maud was seated at the piano but he'd heard no music. She turned as he entered and he saw the fear jump into her eyes.

"Mr. Murdoch! I--"

"Mrs. Pedlow, I must speak to you."

"Please sit down."

"No, thank you, ma'am."

She stared at him. Her gown today was a plain grey silk with silver trims. The collar was white, stiff and high as a man's. The severity of the dress was not complimentary to her pale skin and drab hair.

"Mrs. Pedlow, you have been less than honest with me."

She was about to object but the words wilted in the heat of his anger.

"I have spoken with Annie Brogan. She tells me you did know Dolly Shaw, or rather Dolly Merishaw--"

"That is not the--"

"Ma'am, according to Miss Brogan you were one of Dolly's customers eight years ago. She delivered you of a female child at her farm in Markham."

"How can you believe this woman, Mr. Murdoch? She is nothing but a common stage performer. She is trying to

blacken my name.”

Maud wouldn't have persuaded a cat.

“I have also been informed that Mrs. Shaw's foster son Freddie delivered a letter here on Thursday afternoon.”

“I received no such letter.”

“The boy swears he handed it to you personally. You wrote a letter in reply, which he gave to Mrs. Shaw.”

She turned away from him, studying the sheet of music propped on the piano as if she were about to give a recital.

“Please answer me, ma'am.”

Murdoch felt like grabbing her by the shoulders and spinning her around to face him.

“Mrs. Pedlow, I insist on your explanation.”

At last she turned.

“Mr. Murdoch, I am certain there is not a person in the world who does not have some part of their lives they do not wish to expose to the world.”

“Ma'am?”

“It is true, I did know the woman many years ago. I apologize for prevaricating but it was a most painful time for me. I preferred not to talk about it.”

“You knew I was investigating a murder, yet you lied to me.”

So much for fine vocabulary. He had the impulse to be obscene, rough-tongued. Anything to break through the woman's stubbornness.

“My involvement was so long ago, it seemed unimportant.”

“That was for me to decide.”

She was squeezing and rubbing at her hands as if she were warming up her fingers. She sighed ostentatiously.

“Very well. What you are so insistent on winking out of me, Mr. Murdoch, is perhaps not such a terrible thing. It is however a delicate matter and I ask for your complete discretion.”

“We'll see. I may have no choice in the matter.”

Her little attempt at acting, which was laughable, fell away and when she spoke again, it was with more dignity.

"The fact is that rather late in my life, I conceived a child. My husband was away from home when I realized the happy news. I—I could not bear the scrutiny of my neighbours. I knew how they would gossip about a woman of my age being enceinte. Perhaps I was too sensitive but I craved privacy. I saw Mrs. Merishaw's advertisement and went to her for my lying in."

"And that's where you first met Annie Brogan?"

"I suppose it was, although to tell the truth there was more than one young woman at the farm and I did not care to associate with them."

"That must have been lonely for you. At such an important time?"

She shrank a little at that comment but still didn't crack. "Not at all. I am really quite a solitary sort of person, Mr. Murdoch."

"You told Miss Brogan your baby died shortly after birth."

"That is what I mean by a painful time of my life that I have no wish to relive. Fortunately, if I may put it that way, my cousin had given birth at almost exactly the same time as I, and the poor woman died in the childbed. Of course I wanted to adopt that little girl. To give her a decent home. My cousin was a widow, you see, and much impoverished by the entailment of her husband's estate. Taking on Sarah as my ward eased my terrible loss, as I am sure you can understand, Mr. Murdoch."

Murdoch thought he had never been conned by such an expensively dressed woman before.

"Your husband must have been grieved also."

Maud bent her head and spoke so quietly he could hardly hear her.

"My dear sir, I am in fact throwing myself on your mercy. You have asked me why I was trying to hide my

acquaintance with Mrs. Merishaw. The truth is Mr. Pedlow does not know of my pregnancy. He has always longed for an heir and was dreadfully disappointed when it seemed as if God had seen fit not to so bless us. I decided to wait until the birth was assured before telling him. When the infant was taken from me, I saw no reason to inform him. I feared the sorrow would break his heart."

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Pedlow. I find that incredible."

His sense of Pedlow's heart was that it would withstand the direct hit of a cannon ball.

Her eyes fastened on his as she attempted to sound convincing. "I am telling you the truth. Walter is so delighted with Sarah. I have never told him about the other child and will not do so. As I said, Mr. Murdoch, I am throwing myself on your mercy. I have entrusted you with this painful secret. My future and the future of my little family is in your hands."

Murdoch shifted impatiently. "Does anybody else know?"

She smoothed her skirt, a gesture he had seen women use before when they were buying time.

"I confided in my nephew, Henry. Perhaps I shouldn't have, but my secret was sometimes a burden to me. He was very kind and allowed me my little weep and that was all I needed."

"Was Dolly Shaw aware that you had not told your husband about the child?"

"I don't see how she could have known one way or the other. We rarely talked. I had no further correspondence with her after I left Markham."

"There will be a record of the infant's death in the village register I presume?"

"Mrs. Merishaw took care of all that. I was, er, too overcome."

And I suppose you could say that about Dolly now, he thought. She won't be able to confirm this story one way or the other.

"Do you now admit you received a letter from Mrs. Shaw which asked for money?"

"Yes, I did. I am sorry I did not tell you the truth at first. I..."

Her voice tailed off, trying to lure him into gallantry.

"Did you answer it?"

"Yes. I felt sorry for the woman. I sent a few dollars with the boy."

Murdoch was recording all this information in his notebook. He took his time. Like Annie in the beginning, this woman was giving him only as much truth as she could get away with.

"Did your nephew know about Mrs. Shaw's letter?"

"I believe I did mention it to him, yes."

"What sort of person is Mr. Henry, would you say? Rash? Hot-tempered?"

"Not at all. He is most equable. Why do you ask, Mr. Murdoch?"

"I wonder if he might have taken it upon himself to seek out Mrs. Shaw. Just to make sure she was only asking for a small gratuity and not going in for a spot of blackmail. Is it likely he would have done something like that, Mrs. Pedlow?"

She was starting to look very tight about the mouth and jaw.

"I suppose it is not totally out of the question, but, Mr. Murdoch, I still don't see why you are pursuing this line of enquiry when surely you already have your culprit."

"Who is that, madam?"

"The unfortunate woman, Lily. Her mother treated her badly. I saw such on many an occasion. She must have finally retaliated. You said another boy was killed. It seems to me highly plausible that he was a witness to the first crime and the poor lunatic woman killed him also."

Murdoch now knew that wasn't what had happened, but he wasn't going to tell her yet.

"According to Freddie, Lily ran away before Mrs. Shaw was killed and did not return until the next day. I don't believe she murdered her own mother."

Maud gave a small shrug. "An intruder then—"

"Unlikely. The boy says he heard two people come to the house the night of the murder. Annie Brogan admits she was the first visitor, but she swears she left Dolly quite alive."

"Perhaps she is lying."

Maud was fickle in her choice of suspects.

"I don't think so. The person who came afterward is the one I'd like to talk to. Freddie couldn't tell if it was a man or a woman, but Mr. Golding heard somebody leaving the Shaw house about two o'clock in the morning. He had no doubt it was a woman he heard."

"In spite of what you say, we're back to the daughter then, aren't we? She's a husky woman."

Maud Pedlow was exhibiting more steel at the centre than he would have expected.

"Dolly Shaw was drunk. If she had fallen and knocked herself senseless, it wouldn't take much physical strength to hold a pillow on her head, just great emotional resolve."

There was a long silence, more stiffening of the jaw, then Maud said, "If Dolly wrote a begging letter to me, I am sure she wrote to others. I was far from being her only client."

"The boy swears there was only one letter. She wrote it immediately after she saw the newspaper article about your nephew's reception."

"Mr. Murdoch, you are hounding me. I shall be forced to discuss the matter with my husband."

"In which case I would be forced to explain why I am asking you these questions, ma'am. You have good reason to want Dolly Shaw silenced."

"I find that an extremely impolite remark."

Murdoch almost laughed outright. "Politeness seems a little irrelevant in the case of murder, wouldn't you say,

ma'am?"

Maud chose not to reply but she seemed more distressed. He pressed the advantage.

"To come back to Mr. Henry Pedlow for a moment. You say he is of an equable temperament? Is he a loyal person?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"If he thought the happiness of you and your husband was at stake, might he lose that even disposition?"

"How can I answer such a question? However, I..."

"Please continue, ma'am."

Her voice was shaky when she replied. "I have been concerned about him. It is most upsetting to contemplate the implication of your question but—"

Again she faltered. Murdoch couldn't quite tell if he was in the presence of an actress of Sarah Bernhardt ability or if she was genuinely afraid of the possibilities.

"Why are you worried about your nephew?"

"He has shown signs of instability since returning from India, the sun—"

"Instability, ma'am?"

"Oh, I am sorry. I am not a physician. I shouldn't have said—"

"You don't need a medical degree to use the word. What do you mean by 'instability'?"

"He laughs at inappropriate moments, weeps at nothing...he has flown into terrible tempers over the smallest thwarting. A cabman who is too slow, a passerby who bumps him."

Murdoch regarded her. She was still seated at the piano and as she spoke, her shoulders drooped and her voice was flat. The arrogant veneer had disappeared.

"Do you think your loyal, unstable nephew is capable of murder?"

"If there is extreme provocation, who can ever know what a person is capable of, Mr. Murdoch."

She had avoided a direct answer but Murdoch got the message. She suspected Henry had killed Dolly and she was no doubt happy about it.

“Where would I find Mr. Pedlow now?”

“He is staying at the Avonmore Hotel. He said he had an important engagement this afternoon. I am certain he will be there!”

Murdoch went towards the door. He turned to take his leave.

Mrs. Pedlow was staring straight in front of her, and the expression on her face was one of utter anguish.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE



Henry Pedlow had woken early but he was still sitting in his pyjamas in the armchair beside the bed. A waiter had tapped on the door to deliver his breakfast but he'd sent him away with a surly command. Food seemed irrelevant to him. He was surprised when he came out of his reverie and saw it was after eleven o'clock. He had no recollection of what he had been thinking in the past four hours. He didn't believe he had fallen back to sleep, but the time had vanished, wiped away like a mark on the beach. Stiffly, he got to his feet. His limbs ached and his throat was on fire. The doctor had warned him, of course. It would get worse. A man of few words, he had only added, "We have morphine or opium for the pain, but in the end..." He shrugged. Henry hadn't known this physician long, only since he had arrived back in Toronto, and he knew the man disapproved of him, despised him for the disease. Not that Henry could blame him. He himself was filled with self-contempt. What a fool he'd been. What a stupid, stupid fool.

He began to pace, swept with a surge of emotion so violent he couldn't stand still. He slammed his fist down on the sideboard, making the ornaments bounce. *Stupid! Stupid! Fool!* He'd been warned as soon as he arrived in India. "Watch for the fire-ships. You can't always tell. Even the young ones can have it." But the soft, dark eyes, the compliance of the women proved irresistible.

As suddenly as it had come, his anger vanished. He burst into tears. He couldn't stop. Sobs racked his chest, hurting him, burning his throat. He finally forced himself to

stop crying, not because the grief was over, but because the physical pain it created was too severe.

He was lying facedown on the bed, his head buried in the pillows. He didn't remember moving there. Again he checked the clock. He had lost another half hour. Or had he? Was it ten past eleven when he had last looked? It was now almost noon.

Groaning, he got up off the bed. He'd asked for a fire to be laid and he walked over to the fireplace, struck a match, and lit the paper. The flames leaped, ready to lick around the coal. He waited for a moment but he was afraid to be still for long, too many thoughts rushed in. He went over to the escritoire by the window. The hotel provided stationery, rather good quality letter paper with the hotel crest at the top. He sat down, took one sheet, unscrewed the top of the inkwell, dipped in the pen, and wrote in large letters, "To Whom It May Concern."

He supposed he could address it directly to the detective who was investigating the case but he had forgotten his name.

She hadn't told him immediately, letting him meet Sarah and recounting the story she gave out to the world. This is my ward, and so on. It wasn't until she'd received the letter from Dolly Shaw that she told him the truth.

Henry's thoughts shied away, the shock of that revelation overwhelming him again.

He pulled up the window blind a few inches and gazed down onto the street. A carriage went by, the horse splashing in the rain-filled ruts. The driver, his waterproof glistening, flicked his whip and the horse broke into a canter. A man and a woman huddled together beneath a black umbrella as they hurried towards the hotel. He could see they were not young and something in the way they leaned in to each other, the closeness, suggested a conjugal familiarity.

His envy was like the taste of bile on his tongue. He had never known such ease with any woman and would not now. Except for Maud.

Their connection had meant little to him. A chance to take a willing woman, and he hadn't been in contact with her the entire time he'd been in India. Even her first dreadful revelation hadn't brought them closer. He'd felt guilt, fear, anger, but no real sympathy. Then she'd come to his hotel. She was frantic. The police suspected her, she said. The detective was at her heels. She'd turned to Henry, as desperate as a deer at bay. Impatient with her fear and angry at what she'd done, he'd told her his own secret. He said it brutally, wanting to hurt her. She'd been jolted into agonized tears and then she'd reached for him and held him in her arms, her tears wetting his face. It was when he realized she was weeping for him and not just herself that Henry Pedlow experienced something approaching love for the first time in his life.

The memory was too painful to dwell on, and he looked out of the window again.

Across the road the lamps were lit in the houses. He could see into a drawing room, a maid straightening the antimacassars on the chairs ready for callers.

He felt himself move far away from the scene as if he were drawn up to a high mountain top. The carriage, the man and the woman, the houses, seemed like toys. Another sob threatened and he lowered the blind quickly.

"To Whom It May Concern.

"I wish to make a full confession to the murder." He crossed out the word, could think of none better, and rewrote it.

"the murder of Dolly Shaw."

He no longer knew who had first suggested this course of action, perhaps it was Maud. Regardless, he was now embracing it. In spite of human fear, his mind had become clear and precise. He continued.

“She had discovered details of my past life that I did not wish the world to know. She was attempting to blackmail me. I went to her house to reason with her and in a moment of rage I killed her.”

He paused. Was it necessary to elaborate? Better not. It was safer to keep it simple. However, he inserted, “By suffocation.” He blotted the paper and concluded. “What I do here, I do in full possession of my faculties.”

He considered adding, “I am a condemned man anyway,” but he wasn’t sure if that would weaken the power of the confession. Better to leave it.

There would be some scandal, but he knew he could rely on his uncle Walter to keep that to the minimum. And Maud would die on the rack before she confessed.

He wrote his signature, more clearly than he usually did. There must be no room for doubt. Then he took the album out of the black satchel where he’d stowed it and went over to the fire, which was crackling merrily by now. He placed the book in the middle of the flames. The leather curled immediately and the paper was devoured by the fire. He watched for a moment or two to be certain it was completely destroyed. The chime sounded in his watch and he was startled. It seemed as if another fifteen minutes had slipped out of his mind. The album was bits of ash and he was soaked with perspiration from the heat of the fire. He went over to the washstand, lifted the pitcher, and poured some water into the bowl, splashing it liberally over his face and neck. He wondered if he should shave. It seemed pointless to do so, but some niggling vanity made him decide to proceed. He opened up his razor, realized the water was cool in the bowl, and abandoned the notion. He didn’t want to ring for hot water now.

The satchel where he kept his samples was standing open on the desk, waiting. Carefully, as if he were arranging a display for a customer, he removed one of the bottles, one of the cotton pads, and the wire cone. He considered

praying to prepare himself, but his pain made his soul earthbound. He undressed and lay on the bed, the letter to one side, the chloroform within reach on the other. He thought about Maud and he found some peace.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX



“Mr. Pedlow! Mr. Pedlow! It’s Detective Murdoch here.”

The manager of the Avonmore hovered nervously behind Murdoch and Crabtree, torn between fear and anger. Huge constables and bellowing detectives in the corridor were not conducive to good business. Already a couple of doors had opened and the curious occupants were peeking out.

“Open the door,” said Murdoch to him.

Mr. Tomkin did not waste time protesting. He picked out the key from the ring and unlocked the door.

“Oh my God,” he whispered and collapsed against the wall as if his legs wouldn’t hold him. Murdoch, with Crabtree behind him, entered the room. The air was unpleasantly warm and thick with a sharp, stinging smell. The naked body of Henry Pedlow was lying on the bed. A cotton cloth covered his face and on top of it was a cone-shaped mask. There was a small bottle by his right hand, and a sheet of paper beneath his left. His body was in a position of repose.

“Crabtree, open all the windows, fast as you can.”

Murdoch went to the body and pulled off the cloth. Leaning down, he placed his ear against the man’s chest but it was a perfunctory gesture. Pedlow’s heart had ceased to beat some time before.

Murdoch pulled the piece of paper from underneath the greying hand.

“To Whom It May Concern.”

He could hear the hotel manager making retching noises from outside the door, and he tried not to breathe too

deeply himself. Already his stomach was feeling queasy.

Crabtree joined Murdoch at the bedside, and as he saw the body he shuddered in revulsion. "Dear Lord, what was wrong with the man?"

Henry's entire torso was covered with oozing sores.

"I've seen drawings," Murdoch replied. "I'd say he had syphilis."

Crabtree shook his head in disbelief.

"Is that why he killed himself?"

"Let's see what he wrote."

Murdoch read the letter out loud to the constable, who whistled through his teeth softly when he had finished.

"So that's the story, is it? He's the one who done in the old woman."

"That's what he says."

Crabtree looked at him curiously.

Murdoch put the paper on the desk and went over to the fire, which had burned down to glowing coals. He could see the charred remnants of a leather binding, the letters...*iends*. Dolly's book of reckoning with all its shameful secrets, gone forever. Not that it mattered to him. The children were the ones who suffered most, as far as he was concerned. The innocent paid the bill of the guilty.

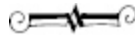
He glanced over his shoulder at Henry's hideous body. Was Sarah the natural child of Maud and Henry Pedlow? If that was the case and it became known, she would have no future at all. And if Walter Pedlow found out, Murdoch was certain, she would have no money even to buy a future.

"Sir? Mr. Murdoch? Shall I have Mr. Tomkin go fetch the coroner and the ambulance?" Crabtree regarded him. "The man was under sentence of death anyway by the looks of it. He's cheated the gallows is all. And a full confession helps us. He wouldn't tell a lie on his deathbed."

Murdoch picked up the poker and stirred the embers in the hearth. A last shred of the album caught fire and melted into ashes.

“You’re right about that, Crabtree. Nobody will doubt it.”

EPILOGUE



The Kitchens and Mrs. Jones and Alwyn had come out to see the games. They were seated on benches at the edge of the tug-of-war strip and were watching the police team hammer in the wooden blocks they used as wedges for the pull. There had been a thunderstorm earlier that morning and the ground was soft and muddy. Not good conditions for a tug-of-war.

“Crabtree seems fit now, Will.”

Murdoch grinned at Arthur Kitchen. “He’s much looser, that’s why.”

“Mr. Murdoch, shame on you,” said Beatrice, but they all laughed. He’d told them what had happened. Brackenreid had been reluctant to abandon his poisoning theory but Crabtree had improved so dramatically when he stopped the strengthening pills that the inspector had been forced to concede.

“Watch me, Mamma,” called Alwyn.

Enid Jones turned to smile at her son. He had picked up a rock and was heaving it the way he’d seen Crabtree heave the shot put not too long ago. Murdoch was glad to see him behaving more like a healthy lad instead of the sober-eyed, clinging boy he was usually. Although he knew he was not being fair, Murdoch had felt impatient with Alwyn since the Shaw case. Lily’s life had been tragic and it would be a long time before the memory of Freddie’s terror and misery stopped haunting him. Thank God, Annie Brogan was doing everything she could to make up for lost time.

Alwyn ran over to his mother for a kiss and stayed there, leaning against her knees.

It was Beatrice Kitchen who'd persuaded the widow to accompany them to the tournament and Murdoch was delighted. He'd never seen Enid so carefree or so pretty. She was wearing a dress of pale pink muslin with delicate flowers on the skirt. Her white straw boater was trimmed with a green band. He thought she looked entrancing.

Henry Pedlow's death had created no stir at all in Toronto society. Murdoch heard from Louise Kenny that the story given out was that Henry had died from an accidental dose of morphine. Even his disease was described as "tropical." The coroner, of course, had ruled otherwise, but Walter seemed to have kept the newspapers away, and the verdict was never published. There was gossip in Dolly's neighbourhood for a while, but it seemed to Murdoch only two people knew the truth, himself and Maud Pedlow.

"My, you are in a study," said a merry voice from behind his shoulder.

Murdoch turned. He scrambled to his feet, tipping his straw hat. "Miss Kirkpatrick, how nice to see you."

"I wouldn't have missed it for the world. I came down with my friend and we've been wandering around ever since the race trying to find you so we could offer our congratulations."

Murdoch hadn't won, beaten by half a wheel by some wiry, bandy-legged detective from headquarters. However, he'd ridden well and he was satisfied.

"Thank you. If I had known you were watching, I would have tried even harder." He glanced around. "Where is your friend?"

"Oh, she saw someone she knew."

The Kitchens and Mrs. Jones were eyeing the young woman with frank curiosity and Murdoch hurriedly introduced them.

"Miss Kirkpatrick is in my dancing class," he said.

“And he’s the best partner I’ve ever had,” Clarice said with a laugh.

“I’m not surprised. Many a night I’ve heard him practising,” interjected Enid. “Mind you, then, I’m not complaining. He is one of the most considerate fellow boarders imaginable.”

She seemed a little flushed, and it was the most Murdoch had ever heard her say of a personal nature.

“Why, thank-”

“Men, are you ready?” called the referee, and their attention was diverted to the competition.

The twelve men on each team gave one final spit on their hands and kicked at the wooden blocks to make sure they were solidly in the ground. The thick rope lay across their feet. Crabtree was the anchor for the police team and he had wrapped the rope through the steel rings on his special leather belt.

“Oh my, you must explain the rules to me, Will,” said Clarice.

“Man the rope!” shouted the referee.

Both teams picked up the heavy manila rope, holding it tight but not pulling yet. Standing to the side were the coaches. The police team’s was Archie Wilson from the mounted division in number-seven station. He was a slim fellow, dressed in his best suit and hat for the occasion, and he was regarding the opponents the way he studied the horses at a sale. Get a sense who was strong, who had some weakness. Puller number four looked to be in pain. He was favouring his right leg. Use that at the crucial moment.

“Take the strain!”

With one sharp movement, all the men leaned backward, their muscles taut. The spectators who lined the strip were silent, expectant.

“Steady-pull!” The referee drove his red-and-white striped stake into the ground at the point of the white centre marker. Immediately, the grenadiers took the advantage

and the red ribbon wrapped around the police team's rope moved forward two inches. Dangerous. Wilson called out.

"Hold." His voice was clear and commanding. Murdoch almost expected him to click his tongue. His men grunted. They were all wearing black knee-length drawers and sleeveless undershirts. The muscles in their calves and arms bulged. Crabtree crouched low to the ground. The team held. The ribbons didn't budge on either side.

"Yeah! Come on, George, pull." Murdoch cupped his hands and yelled at his constable.

"This is so exciting," burbled Clarice. He glanced down at her. She hardly reached to the middle of his chest if you discounted the foliage on her hat. Her face was aglow with pleasure.

"Mr. Murdoch," said Enid on his right, "what is the significance of the red ribbons?"

"They are the markers for each side. If it passes the referee's pole, the team has lost the pull."

Wilson was standing with his back to his team. His hand was behind him and he was giving signals with his fingers. Number four of the grenadiers was ready to crumble. Wilson swirled around with a little jump like a dancer.

"Now!"

The police team heaved, all together, one body. The grenadiers were dragged forward. Their marker was only three inches from the referee's pole.

"Oh, Will. I don't think I can watch." Clarice turned her head away so she was practically hiding in his arm.

"Mr. Murdoch, what are those blue bands for?" Enid touched his other sleeve.

"Pull!" cried Wilson.

"Dig!" countered the other coach.

The men dug in, grunting with the effort and took the strain. Murdoch fastened on the white marker as it wavered in the centre of the rope.

"Pull!"

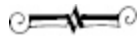
It moved an inch to one side, toward the police team.

“Mr. Murdoch?” repeated Enid.

The marker moved back an inch toward the grenadiers.

Murdoch willed himself to focus his attention on the competition.

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POOR TOM IS COLD

A Murdoch Mystery

Maureen Jennings



MCCLELLAND & STEWART

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Poor Tom *is* Cold



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Acknowledgements

To Iden with love and gratitude, as always

GLOUCESTER : Our flesh and blood, my lord,
 is grown so wild
 That it doth hate what gets it.

EDGAR : [pretending to be a lunatic]
Poor Tom's a-cold

-from *King Lear* (III. iv.)

Prologue

SINCE THE BOY HAD DIED , she didn't sleep and many nights she prowled around the house, searching. She was quiet so as not to wake any of the others, but they knew and talked about it when she wasn't there. This night was particularly bad. It was long past midnight and she had heard the grandfather clock in the hall chime. She counted out the number of gongs, not wanting the sound to die away as it was comforting, like a voice. After a while the snuffles and groans of her sleeping husband were insufferable and she got out of bed. She didn't put on her dressing gown or slippers, even though the room was chill. She went out to the landing. A slit of light was showing beneath the door opposite and she knew he was not yet in bed. She walked over and went in without knocking. He was seated at his desk, writing, and turned quickly when he heard her enter. She was glad she had startled him. She smiled, a false smile, hiding her fear. He regarded her coldly. He didn't get up, didn't exclaim in concern or bewilderment; he merely sat and waited for her to say something.

She moved closer. "You are up late," she said.

"And you."

"You must be cold."

"Not at all."

He indicated the fire, which was still burning in the hearth, and the woollen shawl that was around his shoulders.

She wanted to flee, to run from that icy stare, but she knew this might be her only chance.

"I have seen the looks you give me. They burn my skin like the hot sun."

"I must disillusion you. I have no such desire."

Some of her earliest memories were of witnessing the power her mother could exercise over the many men who visited her, and Peg knew she had no other recourse. She slipped her arms out of her nightgown, letting it fall to her ankles. She tried to take a bold stance, feet apart, the way she had long ago seen her mother do. But her legs were quivering and she couldn't force herself to stand other than with her knees pressed together. Cupping her small breasts in her hands, she pushed them up.

"I ache for your suck," she said. She tried to make her voice coy and sweet, but even to her own ears, she sounded unconvincing.

He scanned her thin body, studying her dispassionately, critically, making it clear how much the choice was his. Then he took the candleholder from his desk and came over to her. She tried not to flinch but she couldn't help herself. He bent down and pulled up the nightgown.

"Allow me to take you back to your room," he said.

Chapter One

IT WAS STILL DARK OUT , not yet dawn, and the flickering street lamps made little dint in the sodden November darkness. Acting Detective William Murdoch pulled his astrakhan hat tighter over his ears, thrust his bare hands deep into his pockets, and shoulders hunched against the cold driving rain, plodded up Ontario Street toward the police station. Pain from an infected tooth had sent him from his bed, and in an attempt to distract himself, he had dressed and set out for work well ahead of his duty time.

He turned onto Wilton just as a cab was going by and stepped back to avoid being splashed. The cabbie slowed his horse in case Murdoch was a potential fare, realised he wasn't, and tipped his whip in acknowledgment as he passed by. He was wrapped in a voluminous black oiled slicker, the high collar masking his lower face and the hood pulled down so low over his forehead that only his eyes were visible. The horse had no such protection and its coat was dark from the rain. Like a lot of cab horses, the beast looked underfed, as if it had barely a trot left in it, but the driver snapped the reins and they heaved into a faster clip. Murdoch watched the rear lamp swaying, warm and bright in the gloom, until the carriage turned south on Parliament, leaving him alone on the dark street.

What if I am the last man on the earth? he thought. What if I'm really dead and in purgatory? Is this what it is? Physical pain and loneliness melding together until he couldn't separate one from the other. Suddenly, somebody, probably a servant, lit a lamp in the upstairs room of one of the houses he was passing and the light winked out through a crack in the curtain. Murdoch was somewhat embarrassed

at the relief he felt and he grinned at his own nonsense. He shook his head to clear out the morbid thoughts and was rewarded by a current of white-hot pain along his jaw, so severe he yelped. Trying to move cautiously to avoid aggravating matters, he continued on his way. He was heartily glad to reach the steps of the station. The outside lamp was burning and the windows were bright.

He pushed open the door, greeted by the familiar smell of woodstove, sawdust, and a lingering sourness from the old clothes and unwashed bodies of the local constituents. The fourth division served Toronto from the working-class streets of River and Sackville in the east, to the nobs who lived in grand houses on Jarvis and Church streets in the west. The east-siders were the ones whose backsides polished the wooden benches in the station hall.

The night-duty sergeant, Gardiner, was seated on a high stool behind the counter, entering his report in the register. He glanced up in surprise to see Murdoch.

"Gawdelpus, you're the early bird."

The detective grunted, not feeling up to a long-winded explanation. His tooth had started hurting about a week ago, but he'd managed to ignore it until yesterday, when the pain had worsened. His landlady, Mrs. Kitchen, sent him to bed with a brown paper and vinegar poultice to hold to his face and had padded his gum with some cotton wool soaked in carbolic. That had helped for a while, but at five o'clock he had been dragged to consciousness with the sensation that every nerve in his body had gathered at a point on his lower jaw and was pulsing there.

He took off his fur hat and shook the rain out of it.

"What's up?" asked the sergeant.

Gardiner was regarding him curiously and Murdoch knew he must look like a pauper's pal.

"Got a toothache," he mumbled. He tried to talk without moving his mouth very much.

"Awful things them toothaches. Keep you up, don't they?"

Murdoch blinked in agreement.

"Better get yourself into the dentist. There's a fellow right at the corner. You could drop in on him."

Murdoch grunted. Not if he could help it. George Crabtree had been forced to visit Dr. Brodie last year and, big and tough as a moose though he might be, the constable had almost fainted when he staggered out of the chair. His face was swollen for weeks.

"My landlady's good," said Murdoch. "Knows a lot ... carbolic ..."

"Wondered what it was I could smell. Helped, did it?"

"Hm."

The sergeant sniffed. "Or is it fish? Did the cat bring something in?"

Murdoch shrugged. The smell was from his sealskin coat, which developed a distinctive odour when it was wet. He'd got it from an old lag a couple of years ago, in exchange for some tobacco, and he considered it a good bargain in spite of the pong.

He started to head for the sanctuary of his office, which was a tiny cubicle across from the cells.

"While you're over there, put some more coal in, will you?" called out Gardiner.

Murdoch opened the stove door, picked up a pair of tongs, seized a large piece of coal and dropped it into the red maw. The action hurt.

There was a waft of chill air as the hall door opened and Ed Hales, the patrol sergeant, came in. He hung his dark lantern on a hook.

"Perishing cold out there."

"It's nothing to what it will be," said Gardiner. "Wait till we get winter."

"You're early this morning, Will."

"He's got toothache," Gardiner answered for him. "Kept him up. He's going to have to have it pulled."

"Hey, I don't know that yet," protested Murdoch.

The sergeant grinned at him. "That kind of pain means abscess. If you don't look after it you could be in bad trouble. Second cousin of the wife's nearly died from an abscess. Poison got into her blood. She was bad for months after, still not right. It affected her mentally. She cries all the time."

"Glad to know that, Gardiner. Lifted my spirits no end did that little tale."

The duty sergeant shrugged, undaunted. "It's the truth, I tell you."

"How about I brew up a pot of tea, Will?" interjected Hales. "Cheer us both up. Come on."

Murdoch was about to refuse but Hales, out of sight of the duty sergeant, nodded warningly. He had something to say.

"I wouldn't mind a mug myself," Gardiner called after them. "I'm parched."

Murdoch followed Hales through to the small back room where the officers ate their meals. The morning shift hadn't arrived yet and the fire was low in the grate, the room chilly.

"Why don't I look after the pot and you see to the fire; you're better at it than me," he said.

"All right," said Hales but he didn't move. He pulled at the ends of his moustache. He was a tall man, ruddy-faced. He was invariably pleasant and even-tempered, qualities that made him popular in the station, but this morning he was visibly distressed.

"Need your ear a minute, Will ... I didn't want to say anything in front of Gardiner, he's got a sniffer for trouble like a rat on offal but," he hesitated, reluctant to admit the bad news, "fact is, young Wicken seems to have gone missing."

"Missing?"

"Well, he don't seem to be on his beat." He rubbed at his moustache. "I did my first check on him at twenty-five minutes past eight. All correct. Did the second at a quarter past ten like normal. Again all correct. But when I went to

check in on him at a quarter past two, he was nowhere to be seen. Supposed to be up at River and Gerrard. I thought maybe he'd stepped into a laneway to have a piss, even though he shouldn't, and I waited a bit. No sign of him. I walked back along Gerrard. Not a whisker. I put pebbles on the doorknobs. You know that little trick."

Murdoch nodded. The constable on the beat was supposed to check the doors of the vacant houses to make sure they were secure, no vagrants camping out. The patrol sergeant sometimes tested the officers with a small stone or piece of dirt. If it was still there at the next round, heaven help the constable on duty.

"When he wasn't at the four o'clock checkpoint, I walked his entire beat in reverse but he was nowhere to be seen. All of the pebbles were still there."

Murdoch frowned. "That's bloody strange. Is he playing up, d'you think? Hiding?"

The younger constables sometimes teased the good-natured patrol sergeant by hiding out until he went by, then innocently meeting him on the return route. It was childish but it relieved the boredom. Murdoch had done it himself when he was on the beat.

Hales shook his head. "He's never done it before and it's past a joke by now. If he isn't here at changeover he could be put on a charge."

"Ill then? Could he have been taken ill? Gone home?"

Even as he said it, Murdoch knew how unlikely that was. Wicken would have gone to the closest alarm box and telephoned in to headquarters.

"He looked healthy as a doctor when I saw him last. He wasn't drunk neither."

The two men looked at each other, mirroring each other's uneasiness.

Murdoch reached for his hat. "I'll go and have another gander. You've got your report to do."

"Thanks, Will. If he is just acting batchy, I'll overlook it as long as he's back on the beat when the next shift comes in. But if he's not there without a damn good reason, it'll be dire."

"Where should he be right now?"

"Coming down River Street from Gerrard. Maybe you could try going the reverse way."

Murdoch stood up. "Save me some tea."

"The whole pot if you find him safe," said Hales. "And you'd better take my lamp. But don't let Gardiner see you if you can help it."

Murdoch went back to the hall. He managed to whip the lantern off the hook while the duty sergeant was turned away, getting a file from the cabinet. However, Gardiner saw him at the door.

"Where's my tea? What are you doing, growing it?"

"Hales's doing it," muttered Murdoch. "Got-tuh go."

The sergeant called after him. "Have them all pulled out. You'll be better off in the long run."

Murdoch waved his hand.

Outside, dawn was coming in begrudgingly and the rain had slowed to a drizzle. He set off at as fast a pace as he could manage, heading east along Wilton to River Street. Even though moving quickly caused the pain to pulse through to his eye socket, he felt the need to hurry. He couldn't imagine why the young constable wasn't on his beat. No one with a brain in his head would take a joke this far and risk losing his job. That left the possibility that something had happened to him and that wasn't good either.

River Street wasn't as heavily populated as the other streets in the division and there were several vacant lots. They reminded him of missing teeth, a gap between molars. Quickly, he checked the doors of the houses that were boarded up. On each knob was balanced a small pebble. Wicken's beat started at the corner of Parliament Street and

Gerrard and would have taken him in an easterly direction toward River Street, where he turned south to Queen, back west, then north again up Parliament. During the long night, he walked this square many times, making sure all the God-fearing were safe in their beds. If he had the bad luck to miss any criminal occurrence, such as a break-in, he was held accountable. As far as the chief constable, Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Grasett, was concerned, a crime meant the constable on the beat was remiss in his duty and he was always reprimanded.

Murdoch turned left onto Gerrard and paused, looking down the deserted street. More lamps were showing in the houses now, welcome smudges of light. If the constable had run into any kind of trouble, it had been silent. No one had raised an alarm.

He continued to Parliament Street, past Toronto General and the Burnside lying-in hospital on the north side of Gerrard. *Even as I'm going by, an infant might be squawling its first cry* . His mind skittered away from the thought because that led straight to Liza, and what they had hoped for. *Four children, Will, and then we'll see. I'm not going to be one of those women whose job in life is to be a breeding mare* . Murdoch sighed. *Fat lot of good all that nattering did us. There won't be any at all now* . The memory of her sudden death from typhoid fever, two years ago, was still a cause for anguish.

He forced himself to focus on what he was doing. Across from the hospital grounds was the medical school. Quite a lot of lights burning there. It took him about fifteen minutes to reach Parliament Street but there was absolutely no sign of Wicken. He stopped for a moment until the throbbing in his jaw subsided. On the southeast corner there was another vacant house. It had once been quite grand, but now the windows were boarded up and the front fence was protecting only weeds, colourless and drooping. He squeezed by the stiff iron gate and walked down the path to

the front door. Shrubs, heavy with raindrops, brushed against him as he went up a short flight of steps into a deeply recessed porch. Hales's pebble was where he'd put it. Murdoch knocked it off, turned the doorknob and shoved. The door had lost much of its paint but was solid wood and it didn't yield. He stepped back, fished out a box of matches from his pocket, and lit the dark lantern. The bull's-eye beam was bright and strong and he directed it at the windows. They too looked intact, no sign of breakage.

There was a flagged path that branched off to the rear of the house and, pushing his way through the long grass that had overgrown it, Murdoch tramped around to a high gate that opened into a walled garden. This was neglected and overgrown, but like the house, suggested a former grandeur. To his right was a patio with a fancy design of yellow and red brick. He walked over to the back door. Around the lintel there was a climbing rosebush, two or three frostbitten buds still on their stems. An image of the church window, Christ's blood on the thorns, jumped into his mind, taking him by surprise with its intensity.

He turned the handle and the door opened easily. He stepped inside.

The light shone on Wicken's body.

He was lying on his left side, facing the door; his head was uncovered and surrounded by a halo of blood, which had soaked much of his blond hair. His legs were crossed at the ankles and between his thighs was wedged his revolver, barrel uppermost, stiff and protruding like a grotesque symbol of manhood.

Chapter Two

PEG HAD ALREADY WEDGED one of the armchairs underneath the doorknob, but in a sudden rush of fear, thinking she heard Nathaniel's voice, she dragged over the chiffoier and pushed it so that it toppled against the chair. There were two doors she had to worry about. This one, which connected with the master bedroom, the other, which opened onto the landing. The latter had been fitted with a bolt some time ago. Nathaniel said this was so he and Harmony could have some privacy from the children. Everything he said had an implied reproach. His previous wife had liked nothing better than to spend time with him alone; she had been loving and compliant.

Not like you. Never like you .

She went back to reassure herself that the bolt was in place. They would have to break the door down to get in. She stood still as she could, listening. Whatever she'd heard had gone. The house was silent.

She shivered. There was no longer any heat in the room as she had used up the last piece of coal the night before. The tips of her fingers were cold. Suddenly she caught a glimpse of herself in the chiffoier mirror and she stared, hardly recognising herself. There was a crust of dried blood at the corner of her mouth where his ring had cut her lip. She touched it gingerly with her tongue and shuddered. The salty taste of her own blood frightened her. He was an old man but still strong and made more so by his rage.

She looked again at her reflection. Her eyelids were reddened from lack of sleep, her hair unpinned and lank. The sight repelled her – a doxy's face if ever there was one. She could have been looking at her own mother. She

snatched the crocheted antimacassar from the Morris chair and draped it over the mirror.

You and the boy will be well looked after, my sweet. I promise . That's what he'd said when he first came courting, and foolishly, desperate, she had given in. She moaned. That promise would not be kept now. His feeling for her had withered away, corroded by his own humiliation.

She's a whore, Father. You've married a whore .

Jarius was calm, his voice as dispassionate as if he were reciting the order of hymns for the day. And they had stared at her from the table, all of them there, even the child.

Did you do this? Did you go to Jarius's room and offer yourself like some Jezebel?

And all she could answer was, *He is trying to murder me. He put poison in my food. He killed Charley .*

But he repeated, *Did you go to his room?*

When she said yes, Nathaniel hit her hard across the face.

One of the candles in the wall sconces sputtered and Peg's heart thudded.

I must save them for nighttime. They're burning down too fast . She reached for the candlesnuffer but stopped herself.

It's all right. He'll be back long before then ... he believed you .

She returned to the couch, suddenly so tired she thought she would fall down. She would rest for a moment, just a moment, then she had to think. She had to make plans. She lay back and closed her eyes.

Off the dining room of the Village Home was a tiny pantry that the matron referred to as "the calming room." Naughty children were put in there, in the dark, until they thought better of their behaviour and were willing to act like grateful Christian children and not heathens. Not too long after she had been admitted, Peg was locked in there for using bad language and for scratching and biting another child.

She stole my cup. The bint took it. It's mine . The matron, Mrs. Southgate, was firm.

Nobody owns the furnishings here. The cups and plates, the knives and forks, belong to everybody. You have behaved most wickedly and you must pray for forgiveness .

Although Peg had kicked and fought, the matron and two of the bigger girls easily subdued her. She was closed inside the pantry to think about her wrongdoing. Perhaps Mrs. Southgate did indeed forget; she was a busy woman with many cares. Perhaps the time in the darkness was not as long as Peg experienced it. However, when she was finally let out, she had messed in her drawers and was hoarse with crying. Overnight, she became a model child and was frequently paraded before visitors as an example of the miracle of love and Christian teaching. When she was sent to Canada as one of the quotient of child emigrants, Mrs. Southgate handed her a splendid testimonial and kissed her.

Peg sat up. The memory burned like acid in her gut.

She got off the couch, went over to the window, and raised the blind. The sky was lighter and relief ran through her body. The night was over. She gave a quick, hard tug on the window sash but she knew it was futile. Frank had nailed it shut earlier in the week. She leaned forward, pressing her forehead against the glass. Even if she smashed it, there was nobody to call to, nobody who would help her. She hadn't been friendly with the neighbours, sensing their disapproval. If word of Jarius's accusation ever got out, they would turn away completely. And she knew he would make sure it did get out.

He was young, fair-haired. His eyes were kind and she could tell he was listening so she tried to speak calmly. She told him everything. About Charley, about the poison she'd tasted the two nights she'd become ill. How they all hated her. She also told him about Jarius and lastly about Frank. "Show me," he'd said to the others and they took him off. "I'll come back," he had said. And he would, she trusted he would .

She felt short of breath, as if the air was being sucked away, and she returned to the couch and lay down again. She'd brought this piece of furniture with her when she'd married Nathaniel and its familiarity was a comfort. She stroked the plush surface as if it were a creature and pulled the velour cover over her face. Under the tent of it, she could smell her own stale flesh.

All she had to do was wait .

Suddenly, there was a sharp rapping on the door and she jumped.

"Stepmother? Stepmother?" the voice outside called to her and the doorknob rattled. "Please let me in, Stepmother. I've made you some porridge for your breakfast ... You must eat something."

Augusta was speaking softly, falsely, as if she were trying to trick a child to take foul medicine. But Peg knew it wasn't medicine that she wanted her to swallow.

She didn't answer and the doorknob shook again. Augusta's voice was less patient this time.

"Stepmother, open the door." Another rap.

A rush of white-hot rage surged through Peg's body and she jumped off the couch and ran over to the door.

"Sod off," she screamed. "You can all sod off. All the frigging lot of you."

She banged with her fists on the unyielding wood.

Chapter Three

MURDOCH BROUGHT THE LANTERN CLOSE to the ravaged face. The source of the injury seemed to be a small circular wound near the right temple, and the blood which was covering the right eye was from that wound. The left eye was open.

What in God's name happened?

Slowly, he swung the beam along the length of the body. The metal of the gun barrel gleamed in the light and abruptly Murdoch tugged the gun loose from between the thighs. Placing the lantern beside him on the floor, he crouched down and snapped open the cylinder. All police pistols had six chambers but, for safety reasons, officers were allowed only five cartridges. The hammer was always to rest on the empty chamber. Wicken's gun held four undischarged cartridges; the fifth had been fired. Near his right shoulder was the empty shell case. Murdoch left it where it was. Hurriedly, he tugged off his own glove and held the back of his hand beneath Wicken's nose to check for any indication of breath, although he knew there could be none. He touched the chin; the skin was grey and cold, and when he tried to move the jaw from side to side, it was stiff. The rigor of death had already started. The constable must have died four or five hours earlier. More carefully, his hands steadying, Murdoch began to scrutinise the body.

Wicken was lying with his left arm underneath him and the right arm was flung across his chest, the gloved hand touching the floor. Just beyond the reach of his fingers was his notebook and underneath that was tucked a piece of paper.

Gingerly, Murdoch extricated it. Printed neatly in pencil were the following words: LIFE IS UNBEARABLE WITHOUT YOUR LOVE.

FORGIVE ME .

He felt a rush of anger. *You stupid boy. May God forgive your sin. I won't .*

He stared at the note again as if there was some answer in the terse words.

LIFE IS UNBEARABLE WITHOUT YOUR LOVE .

Whose love? Why had it been withdrawn?

Murdoch didn't know much about Wicken's personal life. As an acting detective, his rank was above the constable's, and off-duty they were not expected to have much to do with each other. On the occasions when they had met, however, he'd liked the young man. And in fact, he'd talked to him only last evening when Wicken had come on duty. What was it they'd chatted about? He couldn't remember because his toothache had obliterated everything else. No, of course, that's what it was. Wicken expressed sympathy. Said he'd had a tooth pulled when he was young. Murdoch was too proud to ask if it had hurt but Wicken had told him cheerily, "Hurt like the deuce at first but the pain doesn't last that long." The constable had seemed in perfectly good spirits. Quite normal.

And now look at him.

He took out his own notebook and placed the piece of paper inside. He was tempted to inspect the body further but Wicken's rubber cape was wrapped tightly around him, which meant he'd have to be lifted. Murdoch decided to wait until the coroner arrived.

He picked up the lantern and started to walk around the kitchen. The room was totally bare of furnishings although the original rush matting remained. He examined the door and the window next to it. Dust was thick on the sill and there was no sign of forcing around the frame. How had Wicken got into the house? And why choose this particular place to take his own life? Murdoch looked out of the

window at the neglected garden, forlorn and grey in the predawn light. The fence was high all around and the house abutted a laneway on the east side. Parliament Street was on the west. There was no other house overlooking this one. Wicken had made sure his sin was a private one.

He turned back to the body. *Who was the note addressed to?* It didn't sound as if the beloved person had died – more likely rejected him. *You get over it, my lad. Nothing is worth committing such a mortal sin. You might want to die to escape your pain but God says that is according to His will, not yours.* But Murdoch knew he himself had thought such things not so long ago when his fiancée had died. And he wasn't completely sure he was over it.

A few feet away was Wicken's helmet, standing upright as if he'd put it tidily on a shelf. Murdoch picked it up and held it in the light of the lantern. It seemed clean, free of blood. He replaced it in the same spot, then he paced around a second time, saw nothing more, and returned to the body.

He was about to say a brief prayer but he stopped. He could as yet find no forgiveness for Wicken. His pity was with those left behind. He'd heard that the boy's mother was a widow and that there was a younger sister. And he wondered also how the unnamed woman would feel when she learned she had precipitated this self-murder.

He left the house, closing the door tightly behind him. The sky had turned from black to dull grey but the drizzle was unalleviated. He started to jogtrot back to the front gate and along the street to the neighbouring house. There was a plaque on the wrought-iron gate proclaiming this was a livery stable and he could see into a long yard. At the far end was a low building, which he supposed housed the horses. He tried the gate but it was bolted on the inside and he shook it impatiently, prepared to knock the shicey thing off its hinges if need be. However, at that moment a man emerged from the stable, leading a saddled horse.

"Hey you, come over here," Murdoch shouted.

The man hesitated, then approached slowly, the horse swaying behind him, its hooves clacking on the cobblestones.

“Who the sod are you? What’d you want?”

He was quite young, perhaps in his mid-twenties, short and wiry, dressed in corduroy trousers and jacket. His cap was low on his forehead.

“I’m sodding William Murdoch, acting detective, that’s who. Now open up.”

The fellow’s expression changed.

“Sorry, Officer. What’s up? Here –”

He threw back the bolt on the gate and started to swing it open.

“What’s your name?” Murdoch asked.

“Eakin, Frank Eakin.”

“Well, Mr. Eakin, I’m commandeering you. I need somebody to run over to the police station. At once. Ask for Sergeant Hales. Got that? Hales.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Tell him I’ve found Wicken. Tell him we need the ambulance and the coroner.”

“Somebody dead then?” He shifted nervously.

“That’s what it usually means when you get the coroner. Now hurry.” He pointed. “I’m in the empty house on the corner. Tell them to come to the back door.”

Eakin indicated the horse standing listlessly behind him.

“I was just going to exercise Sailor. Shall I take him?”

“Of course take him, unless you can run faster. Get going. Scorch!”

The man swung himself into the saddle, kicked his heels hard into the horse’s sides, and lunged into a gallop out of the gate.

Murdoch turned around and half-ran, half-skittered back to the scene of death.

Chapter Four

JARIUS GIBB PULLED THE CANDLESTICK CLOSER , selected a fresh pen, and dipped it into the inkwell. He did these actions deliberately, watching his own hand to determine if it would betray him with a sign of human weakness. It didn't and, as he entered the date in the ledger, his writing was steady, even and precise as always.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 1895

I write this entry in good health. My tongue is furred but my pulse is quite steady. I have pissed copiously in the chamber and my water is of good colour. I have slept for at least four hours but fitfully. I had expected to experience a natural fatigue but so far that is not the case. In fact, I would say I am quite invigorated.

He paused. Even in his own diary, he had difficulty writing down the absolute truth. He blotted what he had written so far, and continued.

I doubt Father will be with us much longer. He looks more aged every day, although, I regret to say, his temper is unabated. This failing is made worse of course by the present situation. I must admit, even I quailed when we spoke on Saturday night. But he has brought it all on himself so I have no pity. So utterly, utterly unsuitable.

His hand had betrayed him and the writing was suddenly untidy. She was a young woman, it was true, but plain as a mouse, skin like lard, no diddies or arse to rouse a man, no wit or liveliness to explain Nathaniel's infatuation with her.

Frank said in his delicate way that Father was "cunt-struck." To me it was less of the human. Father lusted after her like a dog after a bitch

in heat. I thought he would take her on the dining room table that first night he brought her here. "This is your new mother," he said. None of us had an inkling. He was barely out of mourning. She is younger than Frank. A widow, she said, and she brought her own by-blow with her. A vile boy who immediately made it apparent he carried criminal blood. Within a week, I was missing several coins from my trousers. Frank said he stole from him also. All this denied of course; Father was determined to side with the boy at all costs.

He had written an account of these events several times before but he found himself returning over and over again to that day and the weeks that followed.

I thought at first my "stepmother" must practice whore tricks to keep him panting the way he did but I stood shamelessly outside their bedroom and I heard her refusing him, crying "no" while he grunted and rutted like the goat he had become. I might have felt pity except I thought her coyness must be a way to keep him hot. Augusta says she has not yet conceived but I thought she would when it suited her.

The thought was still so unbearable, Jarius had to lay down his pen and stand up. He went to the table beside the bed where he'd left his pipe and, not bothering to fill it, stuck the stem in his mouth and clenched down hard. He returned to his desk.

I am glad to say the possibility is now remote. I am almost able to rest.

Once again he noticed a tremor in his hand and he forced himself into steadiness.

I cannot pretend I was sorry when the boy died but I must admit it was quite convenient. She plays so easily, I almost feel compunction for her state. Of course nobody believes her. She has given up any pretext of affection for dear Papa and this has been bringing about a rapid cure of his obsession. I have seen his distaste although he attempts to hide it whenever I am present, cooing and caressing with her as he did before.

The memory filled him with contempt. She was as unresponsive as stone. An unpaid whore would have more life.

Like a preening peacock he seems intent on proving his feathers are the brightest. How sweet then that she revealed what she really is. How beautifully she has played into my hands. I could hardly wait to tell him. I had expected he would throw her out immediately but he didn't go that far. And what a pity that has proved to be!

Another pause, another struggle to contain the surge of excitement through his body.

There was quite a scene, I must say. Worthy of the stage. She screaming that I was a liar, which ironically is true but not in this case. Poor Augusta had to hurry Lewis from the room with her hands over his ears. I was not surprised. Only a whore knows language like that and it is my conviction that is what she is.

He had checked the marriage registry and discovered she had been, in fact, legally married and her son was legitimate.

That does not eliminate the fact that she was and still is a tart.

Unfortunately, it didn't mean Nathaniel wouldn't continue even now to dip his sugar stick in her honey pot. And she could catch. She had shown she was fertile.

"Fertile - capable of producing issue."

Jarius had insisted on having connections with his wife, Caroline, almost daily, but even his most vigorous pushing and shoving could not create the heir he yearned for. Her monthly courses had arrived with the regularity of the moon. Then she became ill and there was no possibility.

I will now write down the events of last night.

He was distracted by the sound of somebody talking outside in the hall. Augusta's voice, although he couldn't quite make out what she was saying. Then there was an enraged scream that he knew came from his stepmother, followed by the sound of bangs and thumps. He closed the ledger quickly and waited, listening. Almost at once, there was a sharp rap at the door.

"Jarius! Are you awake?"

"Yes."

"Can I come in?"

"Yes."

Augusta entered, a tray in her hands. Her eyes were bright with anger.

"Did you hear her?"

"How could I not?"

"She was shouting at me in the foulest language. Listen, she's still banging on the door."

"What did you do to provoke her?"

"How can you ask that? I did nothing. I thought she might want something to eat and I brought her up some porridge. She's had nothing since Saturday night. She spewed filth at me for thanks."

"How odd. I was under the impression she liked her porridge."

"Jarius, please! I will not tolerate her behaviour any longer. We have to do something."

"What do you suggest?"

"I don't know. Perhaps you can speak to Papa. He will listen to you. He always does."

"Is he up yet?"

"Not so far."

"And the others?"

"Frank has not shown his face ... nor has my husband."

He lifted his hands in a placating gesture. "I understand how difficult it is for you, my dear, I do truly understand."

In contrast to his soothing voice, his thoughts were full of irritation and contempt for his half-sister. Regrettably, Augusta did not live up to the grandeur of her name; she was short with an unprepossessing figure. Even at this hour, she was already fully dressed and her hair was pinned in a tight coil on top of her head. She insisted on remaining in mourning for her mother and was wearing a black bombazine gown – even though the woman had died more than a year ago. The dull colour didn't suit her fair complexion and she looked washed out.

Augusta gave the tray she was holding a shake, as if it were a live creature and responsible for the situation.

"I have Lewis to consider. He is being exposed to the worst kind of language and behaviour in his very own home."

"That won't do." Jarius clutched the woollen shawl tight around his neck as if he were a woman going to market. "But the poor soul needs our love and sympathy, Aggie. She needs special care. More than we can possibly provide."

She gaped at him. "What do you mean?"

"I have been thinking and praying most of the night. I think we should send for Dr. Ferrier. I fear for her mental stability."

"Oh, dear, Jarius, I don't know if we should go that far."

He came over to her, removed the tray from her hands, and drew her to his chest. "Try not to fret, little Cissie. It will be for the best. Think of your son."

She stood leaning against him. "Jarius, why did he do this to us? My mother was as good a Christian woman as you could wish for. She was devoted to him. Your mother was the same. How could he marry such a one as this?"

He stroked her cheek tenderly. "Hush, little one. He is an old man in his dotage, that's why. But I promise the situation won't continue. Now, why don't you go and stir up Cullie to make me some breakfast."

Augusta stepped back and picked up her tray.

"I had better do that. She's a clumsy girl. She'd set us all on fire if I didn't watch her."

"I'll come down shortly."

She left, closing the door softly behind her.

Jarius went back to the ledger and opened to his last entry.

So far all is proceeding beyond my greatest imaginings. I am sure we will have no difficulty in persuading Ferrier that she belongs in an asylum. In my deepest heart I know it has all been worth it.

In spite of what he wrote, for a brief moment, quickly controlled, he quailed.

The Eakins' servant girl, Janet Cullie, was grating sugar from the loaf into a bowl. Because she was near-sighted, she was bent over close to what she was doing. The low kitchen windows didn't let in much light at the best of times and this morning the rain was virtually obliterating the dull early morning light. There was one oil lamp, which hung from the ceiling, but the wick was turned low. Augusta watched every expenditure, making Janet's life miserable by her constant carping about wastage.

There was the sound of a footstep on the uncarpeted stairs and, involuntarily, the girl flinched.

Sure enough the door was thrust open and her mistress entered. She was carrying a tray, which she put on the kitchen table.

"Clear this away, Janet."

Her voice was cool but the girl knew her well enough by now not to be fooled. Something had riled her bad. Worse even than she'd been for the last two days and Janet thought that was very bad. Very high-up riling.

"Must I finish this first, ma'am?"

"Of course, finish. You should have been done by now."

"Yes, Mrs. Curran. Sorry, ma'am."

She gave a quick curtsy as she had been taught to do in the school. Janet Cullie was only fourteen and this was her first placement. Augusta had taken her from the Industrial Refuge for Girls, a school where orphan girls who might be in danger from bad influences were set to rights by being trained in working skills, mostly domestic service. Janet knew she should be grateful to Augusta, but many nights she cried herself to sleep, her head pushed into the pillow so as not to wake anybody. The school had been strict but there were other girls to chatter with and the work was not anywhere near as hard as what she was expected to do here. Besides, no matter how much she tried not to, she seemed to irritate her mistress and Augusta's voice became sharp and impatient. This only made the girl more nervous and ingratiating.

Augusta picked up the porridge dish from the tray.

"No sense in throwing this out; it wasn't touched." She scraped the porridge back into the pot that was cooking on the stove. "You can start the bacon for Mr. Jarius."

"Shall I do up some for you, ma'am?"

"No, just toast and coffee will suffice. Why isn't the pot on?"

The girl grimaced. "We've run out of coffee, ma'am. There isn't any."

It wasn't Janet's job to order supplies but she was supposed to tell Augusta when they were getting low.

"Make me tea then."

Augusta dropped the porridge dish into the pail of water which stood beside the sink.

"I have a task for you after you have served breakfast."

Janet glanced over at her nervously. Her tone of voice suggested something disagreeable.

"Yes, ma'am."

"I want you to go for Dr. Ferrier. Mrs. Eakin has been taken poorly."

"Yes, ma'am. I'm sorry to hear that, ma'am."

She meant it. Ever since Peg had come to the house, she had felt an affinity for her. The new Mrs. Eakin was a watcher the same as Janet. She knew the poor woman had shut herself up in her sitting room for the past two days, but so far nobody had said a word about it.

"Come from losing her little one, doesn't it?" she continued.

"What?" Augusta turned to stare at her.

"Our under-matron had a little girl that died. Only two she was. Missus never came back to work after. We heard she'd lost her mind. She had -"

She halted. Even though Augusta was standing a few feet away, Janet felt the sudden rage that came from her body.

"Whatever gave you the notion that this was any of your business?"

"I, er ... I'm sorry, ma'am, I didn't mean anything -"

"Don't ever, ever, overstep your position like this again, or you will be dismissed instantly without reference. Do you understand me?"

Janet curtsied. "Yes, ma'am."

"You are a very ignorant girl. There are many women who have the misfortune to lose their children and they do not become lunatics. They continue on with their lives." There was a fleck of spittle at the corner of Augusta's mouth. "Is that clear?"

The girl ducked her head.

"Yes, mistress." Augusta looked as if she could have said much more, but with an ostentatious gesture of self-control, she turned and swept out of the kitchen. Janet sniffed hard, trying not to cry in case Augusta came back in and saw her. But she couldn't help herself and the tears welled up in her eyes. She used her sleeve to wipe away the dribble from her nose. Then she dipped her forefinger in the soft, shiny sugar and stuck it in her mouth. The sweetness on her tongue was comforting and she sucked on her lips to make it last. She

wished desperately that she had somewhere else to go but she didn't.

Chapter Five

WHILE THE CORONER DID a preliminary investigation, Murdoch went to inform Oliver Wicken's mother that her son was dead. They lived on Wilton Street, not far from the police station. He found himself inwardly rehearsing the words he would use.

The house was narrow-fronted with brown gables that even in the dulling rain looked freshly painted. The small yard behind the iron fence was neat and the shrubs trim. At the door, Murdoch took a deep breath, then knocked on the door. There was no response and he was forced to knock again, harder. This time the door opened. A tall woman of middle age stood looking at him enquiringly. The resemblance between her and the dead constable was striking and he assumed this was Mrs. Wicken. He raised his hat.

"Ma'am. My name is Murdoch. I'm a detective at number four station. I, er ..."

His words stuck in his mouth. The truth was too dreadful to say while he was on the doorstep. "May I have a word with you?"

Fear flashed across her face but, perhaps with some instinct of self-preservation, she suppressed it immediately and nodded graciously. "Of course. Please come in. We're in the back."

She led the way down the narrow hall toward the rear of the house. There was an elegance to her that Murdoch hadn't anticipated. Her abundant fair hair was stylishly dressed, her silk wrapper a smart sky-blue stripe with cherry red yoke and flounces.

"We can talk in here," she said and she drew back the portieres that covered the door to the kitchen. They were velvet and a rich garnet colour. Like the outside of the house, the interior gave the impression of care and pride. Green durrie strips had been placed on the linoleum of the hall and there were several framed paintings on the walls, mostly equestrian portraits as far as he could tell.

"You must excuse us, we were just finishing break fast."

By the window was an invalid chair, tilted back to a reclining position. Murdoch blinked, fighting the reflexive impulse to look away. There was a child lying in the chair although it was impossible to tell whether it was male or female. The head was enormous and virtually bald, except for a few sparse strands of white hair that straggled across the forehead. The neck seemed thin as a stalk although it was probably normal size, and he saw that there was a leather brace under the chin to hold the weight of the head. The pale blue eyes beneath the bulging forehead were vacant.

"This is my daughter, Dora."

She bent over and held a sipping cup to the girl's mouth. Murdoch waited. The kitchen seemed to serve a double function as a sitting room; it was crammed with furniture.

Mrs. Wicken concentrated on her task, wiping away the dribbles from the child's chin. Then she turned around and regarded him.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Murdoch, please have a seat." She indicated a comfortable armchair but he was reluctant to take it.

"Is there somewhere we could speak in private?"

She shook her head. "It makes no matter where we talk; Dora can neither hear nor see."

She met his eyes and what she saw there frightened her dreadfully.

"What is it? Is Oliver hurt?"

He plunged in and his mouth was dry. "I'm afraid I have very bad news, Mrs. Wicken. Oliver has met with" – he was going to say, "met with an accident," but that wasn't true. He tried again. "I deeply regret to tell you that your son is dead."

The words were out unsoftened and he would have given anything in the world to call them back, to make them palatable. As if that were possible.

She didn't cry out, or show any immediate sign of grief. She simply stared at him.

"I'm not sure I heard you correctly, sir. Are you referring to my son, Oliver Wicken? He is a police constable."

"Yes, ma'am, I know him well."

Her face had gone the colour of chalk. "I don't understand. What has happened?"

"I myself discovered his body in a vacant house a little while ago ... he had been shot."

"Shot? By whom?"

"I, er ..." Murdoch didn't want to tell her. "He was shot through the head. The bullet was from his own revolver."

He could see her absorbing the implications of what he said but she shook her head.

"I still cannot comprehend what you are saying. Was this an accident?"

"I'm afraid that doesn't seem likely."

"Then I don't understand."

"There was a note beside his body."

He removed it from his notebook and handed it to her. She took it reluctantly and read the message.

"This is preposterous. It makes no sense to me. Who is this addressed to?"

"Did he have a sweetheart?"

"He did not."

"Are you certain, ma'am? That is what the letter implies."

"Of course I am certain. Do you think I don't know my own son? He was devoted to me and his sister. Her care was a

vital part of his life.” Her chin and lower lip were shaking uncontrollably and she turned abruptly to the crippled girl and began to fuss with her covers. The child gurgled some sounds of distress, sensing what she couldn’t hear or see. Her mother picked up the sipping cup again but held it suspended in the air. Her hand was trembling so badly, however, she couldn’t hold the cup steady and she put it down on the table. Murdoch wanted to reach out and comfort her but he couldn’t. Finally, she turned back to face him.

“I know what you are implying, Mr. Murdoch. You think he took his own life.”

“We won’t know for certain until after the inquest but I’m afraid it does seem that way.”

“That is utterly impossible. He isn’t that kind of boy. My son would never commit suicide. He loved both of us too much.”

Murdoch did not reply.

“Let me see that letter again.” She examined it. “I am not even sure if that is his hand.”

He knew printed letters were hard to distinguish but he didn’t contradict her. Abruptly, she returned the letter to him.

“Where is he?”

“At the moment he is still where I found him in the empty house on Gerrard Street. After the jurors have viewed the body he will probably be taken to Humphrey’s Funeral Home for the inquest.”

Suddenly, she sat back in her chair. “I beg your pardon ...” She put her hand to her mouth, turned to the side, and retched violently, two or three times.

Murdoch crossed over to her and put his hand on her shoulder.

“I am so terribly sorry, Mrs. Wicken.”

Chapter Six

WITH A GRUNT, THE CORONER , Arthur Johnson, got to his feet. He was getting on in years and his knees were plaguing him. The wet weather made the ache worse and his temper fractious. He had been examining the wound in Wicken's temple. Murdoch was standing to his right and jammed around the room were the thirteen members of the jury. Constable George Crabtree was at the door. He had been appointed constable of the court and commissioned to find and swear in at least twelve men to serve as jurors. Because of the early hour, he'd managed to net thirteen, catching them before they went to work. For most of the men, this meant missing a day's wages and they had griped and complained. Only two of them were genuinely willing. Albert Chamberlin, retired and lonely, was more than happy to do his duty, and Jabez Clarke, a traveller, was eager because he knew the situation would make for a good tale to recount at a dinner party. However, the sight of the corpse had silenced all of them, even the vociferous labourer, Sam Stevenson, who would sorely miss the money he would have earned that morning.

Johnson beckoned to them irritably. "All of you men, come in closer. What you expect to see from over there is beyond me."

Reluctantly, the men shifted and shuffled forward.

"Come on, come on. Unlike the constable here I haven't got all day."

Murdoch thought for a moment Johnson was referring to Crabtree, then the flippant remark hit him. He would've loved to have made some sharp retort but he daren't show his disapproval too openly. He already had a dickey

relationship with his inspector and if he antagonised Johnson, he ran the risk that the coroner would report him. The fine for insubordination was hefty.

"Have you chosen a foreman?" asked the coroner.

"Yes, sir. I am he." The speaker was a tall, lean-faced man, middle-aged, who was dressed in the sombre clothes of a clerk.

"Your name, sir?"

"Jarius Gibb."

"Mr. Gibb, are you prepared to be sworn in?"

"I am."

"Constable, please address the jury."

Crabtree clasped his official papers and in a voice that would have been easily heard in the rear seats of the new Massey Hall, he read:

"Gentlemen, hearken to your foreman's oath; for the oath he is to take on his part is the oath you are severally to observe and keep on your part.' Mr. Gibb, take this Bible in your right hand."

Gibb did so. He had a rather prissy face with tightly pursed lips as if he was used to disapproving of the transgressions of humanity. Murdoch wondered where he was employed. Crabtree continued:

"You shall diligently inquire and true presentment make of all such matters and things as shall be here given you in charge, on behalf of our Sovereign Lady the Queen, touching on the death of Oliver Wicken now lying dead, of whose body you shall have the view; you shall present no man for hatred, malice, or ill will nor spare any through fear, favour, or affection; but a true verdict give according to the evidence, and the best of your skill and knowledge. So help you God."

"Amen."

Crabtree addressed the remaining jurors:

"The same oath which Jarius Gibb, your foreman upon this inquest, hath now taken before you on his part, you and

each of you are severally well and truly to observe and keep on your parts. So help you God.'"

There was a varied chorus of "Amens" and then the jury was sworn and ready. Johnson had been waiting impatiently for it all to be concluded.

"All right then. Pay attention all of you." He indicated the wound at the right temple. "The bullet entered here, exited here." He raised Wicken's head releasing trapped blood, which dripped onto the floor.

"Blasted butcher's shop," the labourer muttered to his neighbour.

"Watch your language, Stevenson," Crabtree warned. "This is Her Majesty's court now present."

Johnson pushed at the dead man's shoulder. "See, he's getting stiff as a statue. That's what we call 'rigor mortis.' Happens to all of us when we die – man, woman, or babe." He started to warm to his role as demonstrator. "Anybody know what we can tell from the development of rigor?"

The men avoided his eye.

Murdoch said, "When I found him, at about six o'clock this morning, rigor had started in the chin and neck. I figured he'd been dead for approximately five to six hours."

He didn't want to show off, just let Johnson know there was somebody else in the room he couldn't lord it over.

The coroner nodded. "That's right. So let's see. Rigor is now more advanced. I would agree with the detective. He probably died some time between midnight and two o'clock last night. It's quite cold in here so that slows down the stiffening. Now what else can you tell me about the body? Hm? One of you men speak up. What do you see?"

The jurors stared at him, trying to figure out what he wanted. Johnson shook his head impatiently.

"Well, it's obvious, isn't it? He's in uniform. He was on duty. Isn't that right, Murdoch?"

"Yes, sir. The patrol sergeant last spoke to him at a quarter past eleven."

Sergeant Hales had seen Wicken's body before the coroner arrived and he had been very upset. Saying he didn't want to watch them poking and prodding, he'd put himself in charge of keeping back the curious onlookers who had gathered outside.

"His helmet is about six feet away from him. You didn't move it, did you, Murdoch?"

"I did examine it, sir, but I replaced it in the same spot."

"You said the constable's pistol was wedged between his thighs. Show us exactly where it was, will you."

Murdoch had no desire to do so but he couldn't refuse. He walked over to the body, picked up the gun, and holding it by the handle, tried to push it between the rigid thighs. It was obscenely difficult.

"All right," said Johnson. He scanned the jurors, then pointed to one of them, a short, squat man who looked as if he were trying to make himself invisible. "You at the back. Yes, you. You with the scars."

The man's nose was wide and flattened across his face and the lower lid of his right eye was pulled down by the pucker of a scar, exposing the red. The pupil was dull and unseeing.

Murdoch hoped the fellow wasn't sensitive about his appearance.

"What's your name?" asked the coroner.

"Peter Curran, sir."

"Occupation?"

"I work in the livery stable next door, sir."

"What happened to you? A horse kick you?"

"It was a cow actually, sir. I was just a nipper at the time."

"Unfortunate," said the coroner, his tone brisk as if Curran might be one of those malingerers who are always pleading for sympathy. "Now, then." He held up the note that Murdoch had given him. "The detective found this close to the right hand, under the constable's notebook. What did it say again, Murdoch?"

"Life is unbearable without your love. Forgive me."

"Rather poetic, wouldn't you say? You can all have a look at it."

Murdoch handed the note to the closest juror, who took it gingerly, studied it, and then passed it on. One of the men raised his hand as if he were in the classroom. He had a chubby, weather-roughed face and bright, dark eyes.

"Excuse me, sir. But do we have the pencil that this note was wrote with?"

Johnson frowned. "Do you, Murdoch?"

"No, sir. Perhaps he returned it to his pocket."

"We'll look in a minute."

"I do have another question, sir."

"Yes? State your name so I know who I'm dealing with."

"Stevenson, labourer."

"Speak out."

"Why was the gun between Wicken's legs? It seems an odd place for it to be."

"It must have fallen there as he collapsed, then it was fixed in the grip of death. Don't you agree, Mr. Murdoch?"

"Actually, I was wondering about that myself, sir. It would seem more likely to fall beside him."

There was a palpable ripple of uneasiness among the jurors, who sensed the coroner would not take kindly to contradiction. Most of them had learned to be intimidated by authority.

Johnson shook his head. "Typically, in the case of sudden death, the body can go into seizures. The gun must have been trapped at that moment. Let's move on. The spent casing was here, as you see. What now, Stevenson?"

"Where is the bullet?"

"I don't know, still lodged in his head probably. The post mortem examination will tell us."

"Beg pardon, sir."

It was Constable Crabtree who had spoken. "There is a hole in the wall right here beside the door. Can I examine

it?"

"Do, please do."

The constable felt into the small hole and, breaking off some of the plaster, he fished out a bullet and brought it over to Johnson.

"Probably the one that killed him. Take care of it, will you, Mr. Murdoch?"

Murdoch took out one of the envelopes he had at the ready in his pocket and put the bullet into it.

"The entrance of the bullet into the wall seems rather low, sir. Certainly not six feet."

Johnson stared at the spot he indicated. "What religious denomination was the young man?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Hm, an important facet of a man's life, I would say. Strange not to know. Constable?"

"He was Episcopalian, I believe, sir."

"So there. He was no doubt kneeling and saying his prayers. At least he stands a chance of divine forgiveness. Lucky for him he wasn't a Papist. He would head straight to hell for a sin like this."

Murdoch didn't think the coroner could possibly know that he was Roman Catholic but he was stung by the contempt in the man's voice.

"Excuse me, Mr. Johnson." He tried to keep his voice devoid of expression. "At this juncture, we are not absolutely sure he did shoot himself, are we? Won't that be determined at the inquest?"

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, he regretted saying them. They were more likely to close up Johnson's mind than open it.

"No, we are not *absolutely* sure but as close to as makes no difference. We have a farewell note and the position of the wound is consistent with suicide. I fail to see how we can come to any other conclusion."

The jurors were quiet, aware of the rebuke, sympathetic. Then one of them, an elderly man with an old-fashioned full beard, indicated he had a question. Johnson nodded at him.

"Chamberlin, sir. Retired. I was wondering why his helmet was beside him."

"You are most perspicacious. If he were wearing it, the strap would prevent it from being blown off. Conclusion, Wicken must have placed it where he did prior to shooting himself. As to why he did, I have no idea. Some kind of mental preparation, I suppose. People who drown themselves often take off their clothes and fold them up neatly. Like going to bed."

"Can we see his notebook, sir?" This was again from Stevenson.

"As you wish." Johnson handed him the book. A couple of the other men looked over his shoulder.

"There are two entries with yesterday's date. *Monday, November 11.9.07 Gerrard and River. All secure* . The second entry says *Monday, November 11.11.12 Queen and Parliament. All secure and accounted for* . He sounds quite normal here, sir."

"Come, man, what do you expect? He's not going to use his official notebook to write down his inner turmoil. Typically self-murderers vacillate, sometimes for days, until the actual moment."

Stevenson handed back the notebook.

"Let's move on. We'll examine his clothes, then we'll call it a morning."

Murdoch signalled to Crabtree to help him. He undid the neck button of the rubber cape and tugged it away so they could reach into Wicken's pockets. He started with the trousers and pulled out a clean handkerchief from the right-hand pocket and, from the left, a small brown paper package that contained a half slice of cheese. The pencil was here and an iron key.

"Constable, see if it fits the back door," said the coroner.

Crabtree, who seemed even bigger than usual in the cramped room, walked to the door and tried the key. It fit the lock perfectly.

Johnson glanced around at the jurors. "I don't know if there's any more to be done here. We will request a post mortem examination and you will hear that report at the inquest. Murdoch, will you take charge of the effects?"

"Yes, sir."

"Excuse me, Mr. Johnson, could I ask something?" Once again it was the labourer Stevenson who spoke.

"What now? I've got to be getting on. I don't have all day to speculate."

"I've just been thinking, you see."

Johnson made a surprised face that caused some of the other jurors to titter sycophantically.

"What I mean is, I'm wondering why Wicken didn't do himself in the first time."

"What on earth are you talking about?"

His tone was so withering, the man was abashed. Murdoch interjected.

"If I may speak for Mr. Stevenson, sir, I was about to ask the same question. If we are to assume that Wicken was so despondent, why did he wait so long to kill himself? He could have come into the house immediately."

Mr. Johnson smiled. "You weren't listening, Detective. As I said, people can shilly-shally for a long time. To me it is very clear. He is ambivalent about what he is thinking of doing. He knows it is a blasphemy against the Divine Will. He walks his beat, round and round through the empty streets, trying desperately to decide. His sweetheart has abandoned him. His heart is broken. He does not want to live. He has the means at hand to commit the act but he cannot make up his mind. Finally in the darkest hours of the night, he can bear it no longer. He enters the house and ... well, you can see the rest."

"Where did he get the key?" asked Murdoch.

Johnson frowned, annoyed that Murdoch had spoiled the effect of his little speech. "I don't know. Don't the police keep the keys to vacant houses?"

"Occasionally we do, but I don't recall ever seeing this one at the station."

The coroner waved his hand dismissively. "We might not be able to tie up all the loose ends. This is something you, yourself, can investigate. Now, I'm setting the inquest for tomorrow morning at eleven o'clock, Humphrey's Funeral Home." He pulled on his fur-lined kid gloves. "Constable, please read the jurors their duties and obligations. And Mr. Murdoch, as you seem so anxious to have this case absolutely certain, you have my permission to investigate further. You can tell your inspector I have requested it."

He made his way to the door, then he paused and turned around, a bemused look on his face.

"You're not Roman Catholic by any chance, are you, Detective?"

If Murdoch could have controlled his own flush by sheer willpower, he would have done so, but he couldn't. All the other men were gazing at him curiously. The coroner had a fine sense of an exit line.

"As a matter of fact I am, sir. But I don't understand why you ask."

"It's just that you people are so jumpy about suicide. Mortal sin or something in your religion, isn't it? Go to everlasting damnation, don't you?"

"That is the teaching, yes, sir."

"Well, don't let it blind you to the truth, that's all I ask. Remember the oath. We want a true verdict."

Johnson was busy wrapping himself in his muffler or he would have seen the expression on Murdoch's face. Crabtree saw and said loudly, "Off you go then, you men. And don't forget to report in tomorrow. No feeble excuses. You don't show up, you'll be fined."

The jurors shuffled out and Murdoch was left alone with the constable.

“Don’t let him get to you, sir. He’s a first-class fart if I can put it that way.”

“You certainly can, George.”

“Do you think it’s a suicide, Mr. Murdoch?”

“Let’s say I’m keeping an open mind.”

“Shall I have him off to the morgue now?”

“Yes. Ask Hales to go for the ambulance. I’ll wait here.”

The constable left and when the door had closed behind him, Murdoch crouched down beside the dead man.

“May our Lord have mercy on your immortal soul.”

He made the sign of the cross with his thumb on Wicken’s cold forehead.

Chapter Seven

FRANK EAKIN SLICED A PIECE OFF THE APPLE he was holding and held it underneath the mare's nose. She sniffed at the fruit and went to take a nibble but Frank stepped back quickly and put the slice between his own teeth.

"Kiss me," he said and he poked his head forward. The horse tossed her head but didn't move. Frank said again, "Come on, Duchess, kiss me."

Peter Curran was leaning against the stable partition watching. "Doesn't want to, does she? Can't say I blame her."

Suddenly, Frank kicked out and his heel caught Curran right on the shin. He yelped and grasped his leg.

"For God's sake, Frank. What are you doing?"

Eakin didn't deign to answer but he made more seductive noises at the mare and this time she stretched her neck and gently nibbled the piece of apple away from his mouth. He grinned.

"See, she's learning."

"That's wonderful," said Curran sullenly. "You can both join the frigging circus."

However, he made sure he had stepped out of reach as he spoke.

"And you could join the freak show," said Frank, "but I doubt they'd take you. Your face would scare the nippers off."

Peter Curran was used to his brother-in-law's jibes but he didn't ever like them. Only fear of the younger man's temper kept him from retaliating.

"So are we going to twitch her or not? Fellow said he'd come by tomorrow."

Frank gave Duchess the remainder of the apple and stroked the horse's soft nose.

"She's a lovely little tart, isn't she?"

Then he grasped her upper lip and twisted it, holding it tightly pinched between his fingers. Far from shying off, the mare stood motionless as if she had gone into a trance. Curran picked up an iron file from the shelf and started to rub at the exposed front teeth, which were splayed out with age.

"There you go, my pretty. You're going to look like a filly all over again," said Eakin.

"Only in the dark. They'll notice for sure."

"You're a cheerful charley, aren't you? Is something the matter? Is there something darkening your view of life?"

"Leave off, Frank."

He worked on in a sullen silence, while Frank spoke soothingly to the horse.

"Almost done. You just keep your mind on one of those enormous stallion dongs."

"Do you need to be so crude?"

"You only say that because you aren't stopping your beak in my sister. The mares like knee tremblers. And speaking of that, is Aggie still giving you the go-by?"

Curran shrugged but didn't respond.

"I'll give you some advice, even though she's my own flesh and blood. You've got to show her the whip. Give her a goffer about the head. She'll start talking to you."

Curran scooped out the filings from the mare's mouth. "I didn't notice I'd asked for any advice."

"Suit yourself. But she's a mule when she wants to be. Look, you did me a favour by marrying her. I've never seen a woman more anxious to snare a husband. Before you came along, she'd take things out on me. Wouldn't speak to me once for almost two months. Not that I gave a piss about her stupid conversation but it got to be aggravating that she wouldn't answer anything. One day, I just got fed up and I

picked up the slop pail in the kitchen and dumped it all over her. That brought her voice back fast."

Curran rubbed away in silence, the mare still transfixed by Eakin's grip on her lip.

"I'm done," he said and Eakin let go. Duchess ducked her head a few times and snuffled. "Do you think we should puff her glims?"

Frank regarded the mare's sunken eyes. The upper skin had collapsed with age.

"No. She'll have to do. Keep the lamp down low. This fellow is nothing but a country sot. He won't notice." He stroked the horse's neck. "She'll look beautiful."

"Why'd the old gasser pick on me at the viewing?" Curran asked suddenly.

Frank shrugged. "Must have been your open and honest face."

"He made a comment about my eye. I told him the cow kicked me."

"You should have said the truth - it was some poor heifer you were trying to stick it to."

Curran scowled. "Leave off, Frank. I mean it."

"I was joking, for Jesus' sake. Just trying to lighten the mood."

"You needn't bother. You'd be low too if you'd been there when they were examining him. It'll haunt me for the rest of my days."

"Like I said, you should have made yourself scarce when the frog came around recruiting."

"You know I didn't have a chance. The fella came right into the stable and nabbed me."

"Well, put it this way, one good thing is you'll be up on all what's going on, won't you? You and Jarius both."

"He don't show much, does he? Didn't even blink an eye when one of the fellas nominated him as foreman. 'I'll be honoured' was his very words."

"Don't surprise me. He don't have blood in his veins like normal people. I should know."

"Know what?"

Jarius had entered the stable unheard. Frank jumped as if there was a loud noise.

"Nothing," he said.

"We need some help," said Jarius.

"What with?"

"Dr. Ferrier's come but she won't open the door. She's screaming like a street slut." He nodded at Frank. "Where's the axe?"

"In the back."

"Bring it."

"What does Pa say?"

"Nothing. He's leaving everything up to me. Hurry up, I don't have all day. I want to get to my office before the day's wasted completely." He was dressed in outdoor clothes - a smart plaid cape and a black crusher.

Frank tapped his forehead in a mock salute and went to do what he was told. As he went past the last stall, the big grey gelding poked his head over the gate and gave him a quick, hard bite on the shoulder. Frank yelled, spun around, and fetched the horse a savage punch on the side of the head.

Chapter Eight

AFTER THE AMBULANCE HAD TAKEN AWAY Wicken's body, Murdoch and Crabtree started the tedious process of knocking on doors. The constable took the west side of the street and Murdoch the east. There was a string of stores from Gerrard down to Wilton Street and he was able to speak to the shopkeepers, who for the most part were huddled by their stoves with the lamps fully burning. None of them could give him any information. Two or three were familiar with the constable and one confirmed he had seen Wicken walking the beat at ten o'clock last night and said he had seemed quite normal. They had heard nothing. Mrs. Bail, the widow lady who ran a confectionery at number 327, was particularly upset.

"Oh dear, oh my word," she kept repeating. "He came in here once a week on Friday night without fail. He'd catch me just before I closed when he was on his way to work. Very partial to my buttercups with the nut centre. Oh dear, oh my."

She had seen Wicken as usual on Friday last. "He bought a box of chocolate creams. Raspberry flavoured. For his sister, he said, but I suspect it was a sweetheart. They are my best candies."

She was so distressed, Murdoch felt sorry that he had to press her. "In your opinion, Mrs. Bail, did the constable seem in any way despondent or out of sorts?"

She eyed him, puzzled. "Not at all. He was cheery as always. 'Good evening to you, Mrs. Bail,' he'd say. 'What have you got for me to try today?' I experiment with new candies, you see, and I'd let him taste them. I'd made some

maple toffee and he really liked it. Oh my, Mr. Murdoch, why are you asking such a thing?"

Murdoch had said little about the way Wicken had died but she picked up the implications of his question immediately. He hesitated.

"I'm afraid there are indications that he may have taken his own life."

"Oh, no. I cannot believe that. He was too happy. No, Mr. Murdoch, that cannot be."

"Did he ever mention to you that he had a sweetheart?"

"No, he never did. But as I said, I wondered sometimes when he would buy a special box of chocolates. I knew he lived with his mother and a sister who is poorly." She indicated one of the large jars on the shelf behind the counter that was filled with small, brightly coloured candies. "His sister was partial to the Tom Thumb mix and his mother liked the marshmallow drops."

She was close to tears and Murdoch wished he could offer her some solace but he couldn't.

"The coroner's inquest is tomorrow and we hope we'll learn what exactly happened. For now, I'm just trying to find out if anybody heard or saw anything that might have to do with him."

She shook her head. "I did not. I closed up the shop as usual at seven o'clock and retired for the night at a half past nine. Saves the lamp oil."

She gave him a wan smile that nevertheless had the ghost of the coquette in it. She was a small woman, grey-haired and neat in her green silk waist and crisp white apron. She reminded him of his landlady, Mrs. Kitchen, and he responded warmly.

"Indeed it does, ma'am."

She went on to express concern for Wicken's widowed mother. She was as adamant as Mrs. Wicken had been that Oliver was not the kind of man to take his own life.

Finally, as Murdoch was leaving, she took some barley sugar sticks from a jar, put them in a brown paper bag, and thrust it into his hand.

“Freshly made this morning.”

The shop had a wonderful sweet smell of boiled candy.

Because of his painful jaw, Murdoch didn’t want to risk eating anything now but he thanked her and stowed the bag in his pocket.

The next half hour was unforthcoming. From across the road, Crabtree indicated he’d had no success either. They continued making their way south and Murdoch was glad the constable had the dentist Brodie on his side of the street. He wondered if revisiting the scene of his pain would distress him but Crabtree emerged looking much the same.

About half a block below Wilton Street, there was a Chinese laundry and when Murdoch stepped through the front door he was immediately enfolded by the hot moist air. A Chinaman was working on an abacus behind the counter. He was wearing a traditional blue smock and round black hat and his hair was braided into a long queue.

“Can help you?”

Murdoch tapped his own chest. “Me police officer. Need to ask questions.”

The man looked at him uncomprehendingly. Murdoch paused, trying to think how to communicate. “Me police officer,” he repeated in a louder voice. “Ask questions.”

“Washing very cheap. Very clean.”

Behind him in the long narrow shop were two large steaming washtubs. Another man was forking out piles of boiled linen with a long stick and dumping them into a basket, ready for mangling. To his right was a large iron range where a variety of irons were heating.

Murdoch pointed. “He speak English?” He made motions at his mouth but realised he looked as if he was wanting to eat. He called out instead. “Hey, you back there. Do you speak English?”

The Chinaman stopped what he was doing and approached Murdoch. He was young and seemed as wary as a dog with a stranger.

When he was close enough, Murdoch asked, "Speak English?"

"Ay. What ken I do for ye?"

For a moment, Murdoch was confused by his accent, expecting Chinese. Then he realised the man had spoken with a strong Scottish burr.

"Early this morning, a police constable was found dead up at the corner of Gerrard Street. He was on duty last night and I was wondering if you saw him at all or had anything to do with him. He would probably have been walking past here on his beat at various times during the night. Any information you can give me would be much appreciated."

The older man apparently asked a question and there was a spirited exchange between the two of them. Murdoch couldn't tell if they were excited or if it was the rhythm of the language. The younger man turned back to Murdoch.

"I perhaps should present my father, Mr. Sam Lee. I myself am called Foon Lee."

He bowed in such a formal way that Murdoch almost reciprocated. He nodded an acknowledgement.

"I'm Acting Detective William Murdoch from number four station."

"My father would like to know a description of the officer in the case."

"He was young, about the same height as me, but he had a blond moustache, not dark."

"And this unfortunate officer has been the victim of an accident?"

"Something to that effect."

Sam Lee spoke to his son and Murdoch wondered if he understood English better than he was letting on. Foon bowed.

"I must tell you that I myself had got myself off to my bed but my father did encounter the constable last night. The officer opened the door. Apparently it was not locked and he was concerned that all was well. When he was sure that all was as it was intended to be, he left."

He stopped and they both watched Murdoch, waiting for the next move.

"What time was that?"

Foon translated the question to his father.

"It would have been at approximately twenty minutes past eleven o'clock. Mr. Lee is quite assured of the correctness of this time." He indicated a large clock that was hung on the wall, its glass face obscured by steam.

"Will you ask him if there was anything strange about the constable. Was he calm? Distracted in any way? Do you understand what I mean?"

"Ay, I do."

Again the exchange in Chinese.

"My father says the officer has come here on two prior occasions to check on his well-being and they have had pleasant words. Last night was not an exception. The constable seemed quite equal in his temper."

Mr. Lee senior interceded, saying directly to Murdoch, "Lady. Had lady."

"I don't understand."

"Lady, was a lady with him."

Exasperated, Murdoch turned to Foon. "What is he saying?"

"The officer was accompanied by a young woman. She was standing back but he saw her clearly, then they walked up the street together."

Murdoch sighed. It was strictly against regulations for anyone to accompany constables on their beat. However, in spite of what Mrs. Wicken believed, the evidence was pointing to her son having a lover. Someone he was willing to risk his job over.

“Please inform Mr. Lee that he will have to be a witness at the inquest. A constable will come back today with a subpoena.”

There was a flurry of talk, both of them obviously alarmed.

“Mr. Lee wishes to ask what is the charge he is under? He has paid his licence most recently.”

“No, no. He isn’t being charged with anything. At an inquest anybody with information has to tell it. There will be others doing the same. Then the jury can decide what has happened.”

“My father is now wondering if he was not in truth mistaken. That it was not this night that he saw the officer.”

Murdoch faced the older man, gave him a little bow, and spoke slowly and distinctly.

“Mr. Lee. You need not be afraid. You are not in any trouble. All I want you to do is to tell the coroner, the judge, what you have just said to me. That’s all.”

He turned his hands palms up in a universal gesture of openness. As far as he could tell, the Chinaman calmed down.

“You will have to come as his translator,” Murdoch said to the son.

“Very well.”

Both the Lees bowed deeply and Murdoch gave a quick bob himself. It was infectious.

He left. Outside on the grey street, the air was even more chill after the warmth of the laundry and he shivered. He wondered when the mysterious woman was going to turn up and he hoped he wouldn’t be the one to give her the news.

Chapter Nine

BY THE TIME HE GOT TO THE END OF THE BEAT , Murdoch was getting tired. His jaw was still pulsing and when he touched his cheek, it felt swollen. He would have to find a dentist soon and stop being such a lily liver. His moustache was dripping and his hands were freezing because he'd left his lodgings without his gloves, and to make matters worse, he was overly conscious of the fishy miasma all around him from his wet coat. He took out one of the barley sugar sticks and stuck it in his mouth. As long as he kept it away from the bad side of his jaw it seemed fine, and the sweetness filled his mouth.

He had almost reached the corner of Gerrard and Parliament streets, when two men emerged from the house that was next to the livery stable. They were carrying a chair between them on which was sitting a young woman. She was squirming and it took a moment for Murdoch to realise she was strapped to the chair. Her actions were peculiarly lethargic as if she were a mechanical piece that was winding down. A frightened-looking girl, dressed in servant's grey, was endeavouring to hold an umbrella over all of them while an older man, a doctor by the look of him, followed behind. He was speaking in a quick, anxious voice to the woman in the chair.

"Calm yourself, madam. Please calm yourself."

One of the men carrying her was Frank Eakin, the other, the scarred juror whom Murdoch had seen earlier.

The bizarre entourage was heading for a carriage drawn up at the gate but, even as he watched, Murdoch saw the woman's struggles begin to subside completely. They came through the gate and he waited to let them pass. The

woman's head was lolling back against the chair, but she turned in his direction and her eyes, wide with terror, met his.

"Help me," she whispered. "Please, mister, help me."

He had no chance to respond because the doctor stepped in front of him. The coachman opened the door of the carriage and she was lifted in, chair and all. The doctor climbed in himself, immediately pulled down the window blind, and they drove off. The two men, both of them panting from their exertion, watched.

"What's going on?" Murdoch asked.

Curran realised who Murdoch was and he gave him a quick salute.

"Morning, Officer. That's Mrs. Eakin. I'm afraid she's lost her slates. We're getting her to the loony bin."

Murdoch was about to make some polite murmur of condolence but he didn't get the chance.

Eakin snapped at the servant girl. "For God's sake, Cullie. We're getting soaked. You're as useless as a stuck pig. Bring the frigging thing over here."

She jumped to obey and Eakin took the umbrella. "Anything we can do for you, sir?"

"I was coming to speak to the members of the household concerning the death of Constable Wicken. I'm sorry if this is not an appropriate time. I can come back later."

"What is it you're after?"

"Any information. Whether anybody heard the gun shot. That sort of thing."

"Nobody's said anything about it."

"I'd still like to talk to them. We're asking questions of everybody in the vicinity."

Eakin managed to produce a friendlier expression. "Of course. Terrible tragedy, that."

He was studying Murdoch from the shelter of the umbrella and the detective began to get irritated. He was sorry for

the man's circumstances but he didn't feel like spending more time in the rain than he had to.

"It shouldn't take too long," he said.

Eakin looked toward the house. The front door was open and a woman was standing on the threshold watching them. She was dressed in mourning clothes and her hands were clasped in front of her as if in prayer. Whatever Eakin saw there made up his mind.

"You might as well come in now. Get it out of the way."

He extended the umbrella to cover Murdoch and they walked toward the door in awkward intimacy.

"Augusta, this is Detective Murdoch. He wants to ask us all some questions about the fellow they found in the empty house." He was closing up the umbrella as he spoke. "This is my sister, Mrs. Curran." He gestured with his thumb. "Hitched to him."

She stepped back so they could enter, then over his shoulder, she noticed the servant girl who was trailing behind them.

"Janet, you can get back to work. Go in the side entrance."

She bobbed. "Yes, ma'am." She scurried off.

"Come this way, Mr. Murdoch," said Mrs. Curran. "We can talk in the drawing room."

She turned and led the way down the narrow hall but not without a quick glance at Murdoch's boots to determine just how wet they were. He wiped them hurriedly on the doormat and set off after her. Peter Curran was at his heels, and at the door, he tapped Murdoch on the shoulder.

"You don't want me, do you, sir?" asked Curran. "Me being on the jury and all."

"Yes, as a matter of fact I do. It won't affect anything. It can all be repeated for the inquest."

He'd found that asking questions of an entire family at the same time tended to yield a lot of information, if not about the case, certainly about them.

The drawing room fire was laid but unlit and the air was chill. Frank went straight to the fireplace and reached for the box of matches standing by the fender.

"That won't be necessary," said his sister. "I'm sure Mr. Murdoch won't keep us."

Eakin turned to her, glaring in a little spurt of anger.

"Aggie, it's frigging freezing in here. I'm going to light the bloody fire."

His sister didn't retaliate for his rudeness except by a visible tightening of her lips.

"Mr. Murdoch, will you take that chair?" She indicated an armchair next to the fireplace. He sat down, took off his damp hat, and placed it beside the chair. The mantel was draped with black crepe and the mirror above was covered with a grey gauze. He wondered who had died.

Eakin had got a blaze going right away and stretched out his hands to the flames. Then, predictably, he turned to warm his backside. Mrs. Curran took a seat on the Turkish couch opposite him, while her husband remained by the door.

"Shall I light the lamps, Augusta?" In the gloom, Peter Curran would have been a sinister-looking fellow except that his whole bearing was so hangdog, Murdoch felt sorry for him.

She didn't look in his direction at all but addressed the air in front of her. "I would have thought it was obvious we need some light."

Murdoch took a quick glance around the room. There were other crepe trimmings on the sideboard and around the pictures on the walls. The furniture was dark hued and, although the plush green coverings were thick and patterned with gilt flowers, the effect was gloomy. The house wasn't that grand and he had the impression the drawing room wasn't much used. Probably a family aspiring to a lifestyle beyond their class. Fine furniture but not fine manners. On the other hand, to be fair, it had been his

experience that ungraciousness could be found at any level of society.

Curran lit a lamp from the sideboard and brought it closer to where they were sitting. Augusta pointed wordlessly at a small japanned table and he placed it there.

Murdoch took out his notebook to indicate he was ready to start. Frank Eakin, smelling slightly of singed corduroy, came and sat beside his sister. The family resemblance was strong. Short nose and round chin, fair complexion. Augusta had light brown hair that she wore pinned tightly in a knot on top of her head. Eakin was trying without much success to sport side whiskers and a moustache.

"Is this everybody in the house?" asked Murdoch.

"No, there's Mr. Eakin, our father, but I'm afraid he is indisposed. Besides, I'm sure he could not help you. He always takes a sedative at night. Nothing would wake him."

"Anyone else?"

"There's Mr. Jarius Gibb. You must have met him. He's the foreman of the coroner's jury. He is our older brother."

"Stepbrother," interrupted Eakin. "His mother was a widow when she married our father. Unfortunately, she did not live too much longer afterward. Father married for the second time. This Mrs. Eakin, Harmony by name and nature, was our mother."

He was offering this information in a chatty way that Murdoch found odd. As did his sister, obviously, because she frowned at him.

"Frank, really! I doubt that is relevant to the officer's enquiry."

Murdoch had a vivid image of the two of them as small children ready to squabble at any moment. But that early animosity seemed to have hardened into mutual disdain.

He addressed Eakin, trying to be as delicate as he could. "And your wife, sir? She was in the house last night, I assume."

"Who?"

"Mrs. Eakin, the lady who ..." He waved vaguely in the direction of the door.

"That's not my wife. She's married to my father. As I said, Mother died last year. My father married again this April. Quick you might say. Properly speaking, the woman you saw is my stepmother, young as she is."

There was a strange sound from Curran, and Murdoch could have sworn he had guffawed and stifled it immediately. He looked over at Curran but he was sitting in the shadows behind the light and he couldn't see his expression.

"Mrs. *Nathaniel* Eakin was indeed in the house," answered Augusta. "But as you saw, she is dreadfully ill. Her doctor has been forced to commit her to the provincial lunatic asylum. I doubt she would be aware if Beelzebub himself visited us."

Her tone was sharp. No love lost there, Murdoch thought.

"Do you have other servants?" he asked.

"Only Janet, the girl you saw. We hire extra help as we need."

Murdoch felt a twinge of pity for the young servant. He could imagine the amount of work that was foisted on her.

"I assume your husband has spoken to you about the tragedy I am investigating, Mrs. Curran?"

"My brother told me. But I thought the coroner declared him a suicide."

"We won't know anything for certain until after the inquest. That is why I am conducting this investigation."

"Scuse me." Frank got up and went to the fire. He grabbed the poker and gave a recalcitrant piece of coal a couple of good thwacks. Flames leaped out. He stayed where he was, watching the fire.

"I am interested in any information you can give me," said Murdoch. "We think the constable died some time between midnight and one o'clock. Did any of you hear anything?"

"I for one am a very sound sleeper," said Augusta. "I heard nothing at all."

"Where is your bedroom, ma'am?"

"On the third floor. My husband and I have a suite there."

Murdoch nodded at Curran. "What about you, sir?"

"Not a peep. I sleep like the dead."

"You were on the third floor as well?"

Augusta looked at Murdoch as if he had said something quite rude but his guess was right.

Curran chuckled in embarrassment. "Not last night I wasn't. I snore. Keeps my wife aggravated. I was in the stable loft. Better."

"So was I," added Frank. "I have a room there so I can keep an eye on the horses. I didn't hear anything except them farting."

This remark was obviously intended to offend his sister, who took the bait.

"Frank, how many times must I ask you not to be so coarse?"

"That's not coarse, Aggie. It's a fact of nature. Horses fart all the time. Noisy buggers."

Any further argument was halted by the mantel clock which began to announce the hour in such a deep-toned gong, it was impossible to speak. Involuntarily they all looked in its direction. It was a massive bronzed piece, more than two feet high, and the clock face nestled in the middle of the bust of a smiling woman, rather Roman in appearance. Her hair and collar were lavishly hung with imitation coins and the word "Fortune" was embossed on the base. As the sound died away, Murdoch closed his notebook, picked up his hat, and stood up.

"I won't keep you any longer. What time might I catch Mr. Gibb?"

"He works at the city offices. He issues marriage licences. He is usually home by six o'clock."

“Either I or a constable will come back then. For now, I’ll just have a word with your servant before I go.”

Frank Eakin grinned. “Janet’s a fanciful girl, Mr. Murdoch. Don’t take everything she says as gospel. She believes in ghosts. She’s always going on about hearing them wandering round the house.”

“I’ll take that under advisement. Where would I find her, ma’am?”

Augusta stood up. “I’ll take you. She should be in the kitchen.”

“We’ll get back to the stable,” said Eakin. “You won’t want us any more, will you, Officer?”

“Not for now.”

At the door, Mrs. Curran paused and apparently speaking to nobody in particular, she said, “It won’t be necessary to leave the lamp lit.”

Her husband hurried to obey and blew out the light. The sour, smoky smell of the extinguished wick wafted on the air.

Murdoch left with a feeling of relief. Being with this family was like sticking your hand in a wasp’s nest.

Chapter Ten

PEG THOUGHT SHE MUST HAVE BEEN in the bathtub for a very long time but it was hard to be sure. There was no clock in the room and her memory of coming here, of being put into the tub, was not quite real, as if she had been dreaming violent, vivid dreams. However, her eyes were focusing properly now and even though her head felt as if she were inside a blanket, she was no longer under the influence of the sedative. She knew she was in an institution.

She shivered. The water had cooled to the point of discomfort. She turned her head. There were three large bathtubs in the room and she was in the middle one. On her left was a woman whose face, with its well-defined nose and chin and good wide brow, showed some refinement of features. She wasn't young but her hair was still brown and abundant, braided and pinned into a crown on top of her head.

"Hello," said Peg softly.

The woman's eyes were closed and she didn't respond.

"Good girl." The woman in the other tub had spoken loudly. "You'll go to heaven, my dear." Her hair was white and stringy and Peg could see there were large bare patches on her scalp, the skin showing pink.

"Hello," she said.

The woman looked over at her but her eyes were blank and unseeing. Suddenly she burst into harsh crying. Peg could offer no comfort but the tears stopped as abruptly as they'd begun and the woman started to sing a cheerful hymn.

All three women were in the same position. A canvas cover was stretched across the iron tub. There was a hole

for the patient's head; the rest of the body was completely immersed. There was a canvas harness which sloped backward and Peg was fastened to it by a strap at the waist. Her arms were tied at the wrists and her legs were similarly restrained at the ankles. The bonds weren't tight but she couldn't slip out of them. Even if she had been able to get loose, she knew she wouldn't be able to lift the canvas cover because it was tied to rings at the side of the tub.

Somebody will come soon. Keep calm, keep calm .

But the panic swept over her and she couldn't stop it bursting out of her mouth.

A woman in attendant's uniform came hurrying in. She was large and her features were strong to the point of being masculine but her expression was kind. She clucked sympathetically.

"What's this now?"

"Let me out, please let me out."

"Are you cold?" the attendant asked.

"Yes, yes, I am. Can I get out?"

"I'll just warm up the water a bit and that'll feel better. All our ladies show great improvement after a time in the tub. Wish I could do it myself; my beaters get real sore at the end of the day."

"I don't care a frigging toss about your feet. I want to get out of this goddam tub."

The woman wagged her forefinger. "Nasty words like that won't get you anywhere except into trouble."

Peg felt a wave of terror pinch her stomach. This attendant seemed quite kind really but she was like all of them. If you offended, retribution was inevitable. Sometimes it was angry and overt, more often subtle. Small withholdings. Leave her there longer, just fifteen minutes longer in the solitary room. Fifteen minutes that would make the difference between sanity and madness.

She tried to gain back some control. "I'm sorry, truly I am. Please forgive me. I didn't mean it. I was ..."

She was interrupted by her neighbour bursting into sobs again. The attendant nodded over at her.

"Don't worry about Miss Anderson. She's quite harmless."

"Why is she crying like that?"

"She is afraid she won't go to heaven. She was a missionary most of her life."

She went over to the white-haired woman and leaned over close to her face.

"Why don't you sing us another hymn now, Miss Anderson? I do dearly love to hear 'Waiting by the River.'"

Almost without pause, the woman changed from crying to singing. Her voice was hoarse but the rendition was tuneful, years of habit still strong. The attendant came back to Peg and turned on the taps at the end of the tub.

"Is that better? Do you want it hotter?"

"No, thank you. I'm sorry I was so rude. What is your name please?"

"Trayling."

"How long have I been in here?"

"In the bath or in the asylum?"

"The bath."

Trayling consulted the steel watch pinned to her grey apron. Peg noticed the swell of her large breasts which seemed soft even beneath the starched bib. Her sleeve was rolled up past the plump forearm and her skin was freckled and reddened from the water. Peg had to fight hard to keep back a rush of tears. The attendant reminded her of somebody but she couldn't quite recover the memory. It was somebody who had appeared in her dreams many times. Familiar yet unidentifiable, like a place you know you must have visited some time in the past, but cannot name. She'd been told a neighbour had delivered her to Dr. Barnardo's orphanage when her mother disappeared and she thought it might be her she dreamed of.

"You were admitted this afternoon. Dr. Clark thought a bath would calm you and you've been in here for two hours.

He wants you to stay for at least three."

She must have seen the fear because she picked up a sponge from a basket beside the tub, and dipping it in a bowl of cool water, she wiped Peg's brow.

"Best thing is not to fight so. You'll feel better before you know it."

"What is going to happen to me?"

"That's for the doctors to decide. If you act like a good Christian woman, no cussing like you did just now, do what you're told, and you'll soon be allowed to go home."

"And if I'm not good?"

"Then you'll have to stay in here with all the other lunatics."

As if in answer, the woman who hadn't said a word up to now burst into loud laughter. They could hear her splashing her feet in the water. Trayling clucked her tongue disapprovingly.

"Mrs. Stratton, stop that noise. You sound like a heathen if ever I heard one."

She got up stiffly from her stool, rolled down her sleeve, and started to dry her hands on the piece of holland towelling on the chair. She smiled down at Peg. "I'll leave you for now. See if you can get some rest."

She left, her clogs splashing against the water-splattered brick floor.

Peg was so afraid again, she felt nauseated. Her mouth was dry and she wished she had asked for a drink of water. She didn't want to call again, though. She couldn't risk using up the goodwill that the attendant was showing toward her. She lay back, her eyes open wide, looking at the ceiling, which was stained with watermarks from the steam. She forced herself to be calm, to think.

Her memories were returning and at first she wanted to shy away from them, to get lost in the fog of the drug.

No! Think. Get it back .

They'd broken down the door. It had splintered when somebody, Frank probably, wielded an axe. They had all come in, Dr. Ferrier behind them with his black bag. He had talked to her, she remembered that, but she didn't know how long that had taken. He had turned away to his bag, and when he faced her again, he was holding a syringe. She had screamed and kicked it out of his hand. Then Frank and Peter had held her in the chair and Dr. Ferrier got another syringe.

At that moment, she had stepped out of her body and stood to one side, watching. The two men holding her were exerting painful pressure and Frank was cursing because she was fighting so. "I must ask you to temper your language," said the doctor, and she thought what an old-fashioned expression that was. The woman who was struggling to get free was very strong and could easily throw them off if she wanted to but somehow she was being slowed down. She was falling asleep; she was so tired she couldn't help herself.

If you go to sleep now you will die, said the separate self. She moved further away from her body as if she were actually floating near the ceiling. She saw the other Peg tied to the chair with some binding the doctor had brought with him. Then they were carrying her downstairs.

Don't give in. Stay awake.

But sleep was inviting - safe and irresistible. They were outside. She saw Cullie and was sorry the young servant was afraid. Then she was looking at a tall man in a fur hat and a long coat. He had a dark moustache and his eyes were noticing. The Peg in the chair spoke to him.

Help me. Please help me.

He was worried. "I'll help you," he said, although his lips didn't move.

"Psst, you, new woman."

She turned her head to the left. Mrs. Stratton was watching her.

"Yes?" She tried to make her voice friendly.

"Allow me to introduce myself. I'm Mrs. Harold Stratton of Chatham, Ontario. What is your name?"

"Margaret Eakin."

"Are you married?"

"Yes."

"Children?"

"Ye-no. That is, I did have a son but he died."

Mrs. Stratton gazed over at her; her eyes were fierce.
"Murdered, was he?"

Peg turned her head away as abruptly as if she had been struck.

"Yes," she said. "Yes, he was."

Chapter Eleven

WEARILY , MURDOCH HEADED FOR Ontario Street and the comfort of Mrs. Kitchen's parlour. He was cold and hungry, his back ached from walking so long, and the pain in his jaw was all-consuming. Between them, he and Crabtree had questioned virtually every household member on Wicken's beat, but nothing significant had come of it. Many of the people were familiar with the young constable; some of them were sincerely distressed. One or two of the women wept openly. "Such a nice, polite young man," cried Mrs. Jackson, who was the cook at a grand house on Gerrard Street. But she hadn't seen him since the end of the summer when she'd been sitting on the front veranda, it was so scorching that day. "Madam allowed all us servants, even young Eddie, to come outside after evening chores. Very kind it was. The constable went by and we joked at him. He looked so hot, he did, in his uniform."

Most people tried to be helpful, would have manufactured information if they could, but essentially nobody told him anything new. Nobody other than Mr. Lee had actually seen Wicken or his companion. It was a night when everybody was as snug as they could be in their own houses.

Lamps were lit along the street, the macadam black and slick in the rain. Not for the first time Murdoch wished he were coming home to Liza. Closely following on that thought, however, like a herding dog on the heels of a sheep, was an image of Enid Jones, the young widow who was also a boarder at the Kitchens. Under different circumstances, Murdoch had to admit he would have been paying court to her but she was a devout Baptist, he, a

Roman Catholic, although not so devout. Those differences of faith seemed irreconcilable.

He was passing one of the big houses on Wilton Street. The curtains were not drawn and he could see into the front sitting room. Two men, one about his own age, were lounging in their armchairs in front of the fire. They were wearing claret-coloured smoking jackets and he saw them both, in unconscious unison, take a protracted luxurious pull on their respective cigars. The furnishings were opulent and the room was golden from the bright firelight. Murdoch knew the two men slightly, knew they were both lawyers and that the son had joined his father's firm. He felt a sharp stab of envy. He walked on by, realising it wasn't the affluence of the men that he was jealous of, so much as the feeling of security surrounding them and how comfortable they seemed to be in each other's company. He hadn't thought about his own father in a while, deliberately keeping his memories as buried as possible, but he wondered if he was even still alive. The life of a fisherman was a dangerous one, after all. However, he assumed somebody would have informed him of any catastrophe.

Murdoch didn't particularly like his own envy. He'd seen too much of it in his father and had experienced over and over again the man's rancour, his unrelenting jealousy of his own son. Once again his thoughts flew to Liza. If she had lived they would be married by now, probably with a babe, and he himself would have been struggling with the complexity of fatherhood.

Oh, but I would have wanted it. The words were so strong in his mind, he thought for a moment he'd said them out loud. At times, his grief at her death seemed as fresh as ever. He looked for her in the women he passed on the street, dreamed of holding her in his arms, dreamed that she wasn't dead but merely gone away. After those dreams he awoke angry; after the loving dreams he awoke aching.

However, over the past few months he had found himself actively seeking for a sweetheart. He had started dancing lessons, taken to it quite well really, even though his only dancing partner at first was the instructor himself, Professor Otranto, who took the lady's part. Then in the summer he'd attended his first mixed class and met a young woman who worked at the music store on King Street. She had seemed most receptive toward him until she discovered he was Roman Catholic. She was Methodist. "My father would disown me. And I'm all he's got now," she had said sadly. As a result, Murdoch had given up his dancing classes, reluctant to see her there and be tantalised by what he couldn't have.

And now, stronger all the time, were his feelings for Enid. Would he change his faith in order to fit with a woman's? He tried to be honest with himself, sighed, and had to admit, fair or not, he couldn't see himself doing that. He'd never even set foot in a church other than a Catholic one. In that respect he'd been thoroughly indoctrinated by the priests of his childhood. About time I gave this some thought, he said to himself, again not for the first time. But later, not when his head was pounding, not when the rain had washed all colour from the world, and certainly not on the same day a fine young man had been ripped from life before he'd even lived much of it.

As he approached the house, he experienced a rush of pleasure. The lamps were lit in the front parlour and he knew Mrs. Kitchen would have his supper waiting for him. She prided herself on being a "plain cook," which meant that the meat was often overdone and the potatoes boiled into tastelessness, but he didn't mind. Since he had moved in with the Kitchens three years ago, they had become dear friends. The closest thing to a family he had ever known. He opened the door and entered the narrow hall, also well-lit tonight. He had hardly taken off his hat and coat when his landlady came hurrying out of the kitchen.

"Oh my, what dreadful weather. Come and get yourself warm this minute. The fire's going in the parlour and your tea is all ready. I'll bring it right in."

Murdoch blew on his cold hands.

"I forgot my gloves this morning."

Then he noticed that the chenille curtains across the rear door were lowered.

He nodded in that direction. "How's Arthur?"

"A bit poorly. This damp weather is hard for him."

She took his astrakhan hat from the coat tree where he'd hung it and shook off the rain drops. "I've minced up some lamb for you and mashed potatoes. And I've boiled up the rutabaga. I thought you'd be glad of soft food. I'm sure that tooth is bothersome. I don't suppose you've had it tended to, have you?"

"I confess I have not. Cowardice won out."

"I'll bring you some more clove oil."

"Thank you, Mrs. K. Can I go and see him?"

"Of course. He's been brooding too much. See if you can take his mind off things."

As he lifted the curtain aside, Mrs. Kitchen said, "He asked me to close them, said the draft was bothering him. Fact is he's wrapped up tight so I don't know what it could be."

The ever-present worry about her husband was close to the surface tonight. Usually, she acted as if he were suffering from a bad head cold that would clear up before long.

She returned to the kitchen and Murdoch went into the room.

Arthur Kitchen was wrapped in a tartan blanket, sitting in his wicker Bath chair. He seemed to be asleep, but at Murdoch's entrance, he opened his eyes and grinned with pleasure.

"Hello, Will. You're late tonight. Something happen?"

"I'm afraid so. I'll tell you about it after my tea."

They both knew Mrs. Kitchen wouldn't let them talk until Murdoch had been properly fed. But he valued their chats and both the Kitchens loved to hear about his experiences with what Arthur termed "the fascinating diversity of the criminal strand in the fabric of society." Arthur almost never went out and certainly hadn't stirred from home during the entire last six weeks of wet, chilly weather.

"How's your tooth?"

"Making itself known. You've been a bit poorly today, Mrs. K. said."

Arthur nodded and suddenly coughed. He had a cloth which he held close to his mouth, but Murdoch could see how much blood he expectorated. There was a fetid odour in the room that not even the bucket of carbolic Mrs. Kitchen had placed in the corner of the room could disguise. The window was closed tonight. Another deviation from the usual routine. Even in the bitterly cold winter months, Mrs. Kitchen had kept the window open in the hope that fresh air would arrest the progress of the disease. She tried out every treatment she heard of and Murdoch couldn't tell whether it was, in fact, the efficacy of these cures or her desire that had kept Arthur alive this long.

A fire was burning in the hearth but there was only one lamp lit on the mantelpiece and the room was gloomy. He was about to offer to light a lamp when Mrs. Kitchen came in. She was carrying a jug and a glass.

"Good heavens, what are you doing sitting in the dark like this?"

Arthur shrugged listlessly.

"I'll light the sconces, shall I?" asked Murdoch.

"Yes, please, and those two lamps on the sideboard. Poor light is unhealthy."

Murdoch set to and Beatrice poured water from the jug into the glass.

"Here you are, Arthur. Drink it right down." She saw the bloodied rag and whisked it away into the bucket that stood

beside the chair. She handed her husband a fresh piece of cloth.

"Mrs. O'Brien's niece has a friend who was completely cured of the consumption by drinking several glasses of hot water every day. We're going to try it," she said to Murdoch.

"Mother, it's a good thing my kidneys aren't in the same condition as my lungs. I have to make water on the hour every hour."

"Arthur! Mind what you're saying."

Mrs. K. treated Murdoch the same way she treated the priest - as if their ears must be kept pure from any reference to body parts or functions and, God forbid, any obscenity.

Arthur sipped the hot water, then immediately went into a fit of coughing. This time the fresh cloth was filled. The water had spilled all over him and Mrs. Kitchen wiped at the blanket. There was blood there too.

"I'll get another glass. Won't be a minute."

Arthur shook his head. "No, Mother, please. I can't."

"Of course you can. It was too hot was the problem."

"I thought it was supposed to be hot," he whispered.

She ignored his remark, shaking her head in disapproval as if he were being a finicky child.

"Mr. Murdoch, your tea will be ready in just a minute."

"Has Mrs. Jones eaten yet?" Murdoch kept his voice as casual as he could, knowing his landlady's avid interest.

"Yes, she was down at six. She has a big piece of work to do."

"Another legal brief?"

"I believe so. Such a hard-working young woman. She hasn't stopped all day."

She held out her hand for the empty glass. "I'm going to bring you some of Arthur's medicine. It'll help you sleep until you get that tooth looked after. If I may say so, you look quite exhausted."

She left for the kitchen. As soon as the door closed, Arthur turned to Murdoch and gave him a wry grin.

"There's something makes you sleep better than any laudanum and it's natural."

"What is this, a riddle?" asked Murdoch, pleased by the revival in his landlord's spirits.

"No riddle. I'm referring to conjugal relations. The best cure for insomnia is to have connections with the woman you love."

Murdoch could feel himself blushing like a green youth. Arthur had never spoken so personally to him before.

"I am assuming from your expression this is not a joy you have yet experienced, Will?"

"Well ... I ..."

Murdoch thought his passionate but unconsummated caresses with Liza didn't count, and before her there had only been awkward fumbings with a neighbour's daughter when he was seventeen.

"I must say I don't have the interest right now," continued Arthur. "But I miss it. So I am being so bold as to give you some advice, Will. Don't let the differences get in the way."

Murdoch was confused as to what he meant by that.

"She's a good woman, no matter that she's Baptist. Still young. Her face lights up whenever she sees you."

"You're referring to Mrs. Jones?"

"Who else? I saw the way she was at the police games when we were all watching the tug-of-war." He spoke in a good imitation of Enid's lilting Welsh accent. "What does the blue marker indicate, Mr. Murdoch?" Ha. She didn't care a jot. She just didn't want you paying attention to that other young woman."

Mrs. Kitchen came in and overheard these last words. "He's better off without that one. Flighty, I thought. Here you go, Arthur."

While she stood over him, Arthur drank all the hot water. This time he didn't cough it back. "There, you see!" said his

wife.

"I'll go and change into my slippers," said Murdoch, glad to escape any further talk about his love life.

Mrs. Jones's room was at the top of the stairs, across the landing from his. Her door was closed but he could hear the rapid clack of the typewriting machine. Her face lit up, did it? His too probably. But what on earth was he going to do about it?

The clove oil and the vinegar compress had relieved the toothache somewhat, and although he could hardly stop himself from yawning, Murdoch felt better. He and the Kitchens were in their sitting room. All three of them were tucked under covers, as Mrs. K. had opened the window. Arthur's mood had swung in the opposite direction, typical of a consumptive. Murdoch had just finished telling them about Wicken's death and the subsequent round of questioning he and Crabtree had gone through.

"How's the latest arrival?" asked Mrs. Kitchen, referring to the constable's newborn son.

"Healthy as a horse and growing like a weed according to George."

"That's good."

Her husband glanced over at her and Murdoch knew they were both thinking about the son they had lost so many years ago. He had lived for only three weeks.

"When's the inquest going to happen?" asked Arthur.

"Tomorrow."

"Your Inspector Brackenreid isn't going to be too happy if the inquest comes in with a suicide verdict. Not on his force."

Arthur carefully removed a dried pansy from the waxed paper where it had been pressed and started to glue it onto a strip of stiff cardboard. He was helping his wife make

bookmarks. She earned a little money by selling handmade articles to the fancy-goods shop on Queen Street.

"I feel sorry for his sweetheart. Poor thing, having that on her conscience. Suicides are always hardest for the survivors," said Mrs. Kitchen.

"Not as far as the Lord is concerned," said Arthur.

Beatrice selected an ivy leaf for the bottom of the bookmark. "Of course. But I do wonder why she would reject such a nice young man."

Mrs. Kitchen had never met Wicken but it was enough for her that Murdoch had liked him and that he had had a widowed mother.

"I'll light a candle tomorrow for the sake of his mother. How ever she will cope I don't know. She won't get any insurance compensation, will she?"

"Not if the verdict is suicide."

Murdoch yawned again.

"Off to bed with you, this instance," said Mrs. Kitchen.

"Yes, ma'am." He pushed away his blanket.

"I put the portable oil heater at the end of the landing. Why don't you leave your door open and you'll be warmer. And don't forget to take two spoonfuls of the syrup. It'll make you sleep like a baby," said Beatrice.

"That or the other thing I mentioned," added Arthur.

Mrs. Kitchen looked at him with curiosity. "What other thing?"

"Nothing," said Murdoch. "He means counting the rosary beads."

"Really? That shouldn't be so boring as to put us to sleep though, should it?"

Mrs. Kitchen was very devout, especially when it suited her.

"You're quite right, Mrs. K. But toothache or not, I think I'll be out the minute I put my head on the pillow."

He shook hands good night. Arthur's skin was hot with the fever but at least he wasn't moping.

Murdoch left them and went to his room. Enid's door was slightly ajar and he could hear the sounds of sleep from her and the boy. He undressed quickly and got into bed but he closed his door. He thought that even drugged with laudanum he might be kept awake with what the priest would call impure thoughts.

Chapter Twelve

CULLIE KNOCKED ON THE DOOR SOFTLY . On damp days such as this one, Jarius liked to take a foot-bath before bed in the conviction that it kept away colds and influenza. She had brought up the pitcher of water.

"Come in."

She could hear the impatience in his voice and she shrank. Jarius never shouted at her or slapped her the way Frank did, but she was more afraid of him than anybody else in the household. Whenever she had a task to do, like build up the fire or, as now, bring him hot water, he never allowed her to get on with it but sat watching. She sensed something in that scrutiny not exactly malevolent, but not kind either, and her nervousness always made her clumsy.

She entered the room. He was sitting by the fire, wrapped in his shawl, already undressed for bed. His nightshirt was pulled up to his knees, exposing his spindly calves.

"Ah Janet, good. I've been waiting."

"Sorry, Mr. Gibb, I had the water bottles to fill for Missus."

He waved his hand, indicating she should pour the water into the enamel bowl that he'd placed by his feet. She came closer but, as she poured the water, it splashed over his legs.

He yelped. "Damn it, girl, what are you doing?"

"Oh I'm sorry, sir, I ..."

"Get a cloth."

She put the pitcher on the floor and scurried to the washstand by the bed to fetch a towel. He didn't take it from her but pointed at his legs.

"Wipe them off."

"Yes, sir."

She dabbed at the pale, hairy shanks, all too aware of the parted knees protruding from the flannel nightshirt. Jarius made no attempt to assist her or to do it himself.

"That's enough. Finish pouring the water and be more careful."

She tried again but he didn't move back, which forced her to bend closer to the bowl on the floor. This time she managed not to splash. He eased his feet into the water. Gibb was of middle age but his feet were old man's feet, his toes bent, reddish corns on the joints. Janet hovered beside him waiting for her release.

"Where's the mustard?"

She gasped. "I, er, I-I'm sorry, Mr. Jarius, I'll go get it."

"No! It's too late now. Remember next time."

"Yes, sir."

The girl squirmed in her misery.

Jarius hitched his nightshirt up his thighs. He was looking into the fire, not at her, and when he spoke his voice was quite gentle.

"I hope you weren't too frightened by the police officer today."

"No, sir. He was very kind. Not frightening at all."

"I see. That explains it."

She waited but he didn't seem as if he were going to continue. The silence was unbearable. Like a fly caught in a web, Janet could only hold out for so long.

"Beg pardon, sir. What does it explain?"

Now he looked up at her. "My sister tells me you had a lot to say to the kind detective. You seem to have told him all sorts of things about the family. Unnecessary things."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Jarius. It sort of burst out. He asked me to tell him anything I could."

Gibb reached over and caught her hand. He started to stroke it with his thumb.

"Janet, you are a silly girl to imagine gossip is of any importance to the police. But tell me truthfully, what exactly

did you say?"

"Nothing really, sir. Just that there'd been a big row on Saturday night and that Mrs. Eakin had shut herself up in her room. Wouldn't eat nor drink."

He continued to stroke the back of her hand and his touch burned.

"Did you by any chance also load the poor man's ear with why there was a quarrel?"

"No, I didn't. If you remember, Missus sent me out of the room when it all started."

"Quite so. Was the detective at all curious?"

"I can't say especially. He listened to everything and wrote down things in his book."

Jarius released her hand.

"I'm sure that is the last we will see of him, but if by chance he does come back, you will be more discreet, won't you, my dear? You will keep family matters to yourself from now on."

"Yes, sir. I'm sorry, sir. I didn't mean no harm."

"Of course you didn't. Now get off to bed with you. It's eleven o'clock."

Janet curtsied and headed gratefully for the door. Her legs were trembling. In fact she did know what the quarrel was about because she had listened at the dining room door. But she hadn't told Murdoch that. Her mistress had insisted on being present during the interview and she knew, if she had told everything, she would have been dismissed sure as houses.

She was just about to close the door behind her when Jarius called out.

"Janet, you forgot to bring me my writing box."

He indicated the scribe's desk that was on the dresser. She hurried back and he waited for her to place it in his lap.

"Thank you, my dear. Good night."

"Good night, sir."

She hurried off.

Jarius waited a moment, then fished under the chair cushion and pulled out a flat leather pouch. He untied the thongs, removed a key, and unlocked the lid of the desk. He took out his ledger and the fountain pen. Then momentarily distracted, he watched the fire. As a child he'd sat like this many an evening, making up stories about the castles and cliffs he saw in the glowing coals. He had created that imaginary world to escape from the misery of his life. A mother who was never well, hardly ever laughed that he could recall, and who demanded from her young son an emotional sustenance he could not provide. His eyes were starting to itch and he looked away. Then, taking up his pen, he began.

So draws to a close this most difficult of days. I had little patience with any of my customers today, which I suppose is not surprising. There were five all together wanting to marry before the year is out. One of the women showed clearly that she was already with child, but she and the prospective groom dabbled in each other's palms as if the prize was still to be had. The men smack their lips when they name the wedding date. You can practically see their members quivering in their breeches. Most of the girls, for that is what they are, act coy but I can always tell the ones that are pretending. Who are as eager for a screw as their men. There are more of that kind than we think.

Jarius paused. He'd understood at once when Peg came into his room that it was not from desire for him. He hated her even more that she thought he would be brought down by such a pitiful display. He was not the least like the eager men he saw in his office every day.

They said she fought like a trapped vixen when Ferrier came. She had to be sedated. "A needle right into her arse" was how Frank put it, in his usual delicate way. They intend to keep her in the asylum for several days to assess her state.

He stopped writing and wiped his pen with a piece of felt. The clock on his dressing table chimed the hour. He heard the sound of footsteps coming up the stairs. Augusta was going to bed. She paused and he knew she was considering coming in to talk to him, but she thought better of it.

Father has stayed in his room all day. I went to see him before supper but he had little to say. "A peck of trouble," was all he would offer. I am sure he is sick of her but who knows if that will stop him rutting. It is strange to write this but I am quite exhilarated. Tired yes, but excited. It seems as if I am able to resolve these same troubles.

He had been out of mourning for one month for my wretched stepmother when he claims to have met up with the tart. However, I strongly suspect he was dallying with her long before. And she of course would have no respect for his state. The sooner married, the better for her. A chance for his money.

The memory of that first meeting was bitter to him. Peg, small and plain, but dressed in a cream silk and lace gown for her wedding day. His father doting over her, kissing her on the mouth without heed to anyone else. Her child, silent and watchful, ugly.

He blotted his page and closed the ledger. There was a carafe of water and a glass on his desk and he poured out some water, swilled it around in his mouth, and spat into his handkerchief as if he had a foul taste in his mouth.

For a moment he wavered, wanting to go to bed but his need was too great, overriding the desire for sleep. He took up his lamp and left his room quietly, hurrying down the backstairs as if he were a harried servant.

Chapter Thirteen

SHE WAS TRYING TO WAKE UP but her eyelids were stuck together and she couldn't open them. She'd been crying, she knew that; the salty taste of tears was caught in her nostrils. She could hear her mother talking to somebody, a man. "Shut her up," he said. "Give her something to shut her up else she'll get what for." Her mother was clad only in her drawers, her breasts swinging as she bent over the bed. The man was naked. "I did. She'll be out in a minute," said her mother. But Peg fought against the weight of sleep until she could do so no longer.

She opened her eyes and lay still, listening. Where was she? She could hear the sounds of other people, a soft snore, a bed creaking as somebody turned over. She was in a narrow bed that felt hard, the sheets rough. She wasn't at Dr. Barnardo's - she was too old - nor at home with Harry. The bed wasn't the soft luxuriant feather mattress that he loved.

Think. What has happened?

Then, as suddenly as if the stereoscope had come into focus, she found the details.

I'm not married to Harry any more. He died. I married Mr. Nathaniel Eakin .

As fast as she registered that knowledge, she felt everything she was trying to keep at bay rush toward her, bringing such desolation the pain was almost physical.

I have been committed to the lunatic asylum. I have been here since yesterday .

The occupant in the adjoining bed, Mrs. Mallory, turned, muttering some unintelligible words. Peg waited to see if she had woken up, but she hadn't. She was a farmer's wife

who had been in the asylum for several months suffering from mental anxiety. She wouldn't talk above a whisper and sat in a chair, rocking ceaselessly.

Over by the window were Miss Anderson, whom she'd met last night in the baths, and Mrs. Foster, an elderly woman who confessed she'd been in the asylum for six years. She knew everyone's history and was curious to know about Peg. She had insisted on taking her by the arm and leading her down the corridor where the patients were taking a walk before lights out.

"It's the change of life that's affected her," she said, referring to the farmer's wife. "You've got that to look forward to, dear. It comes to us early in here."

Peg knew from her experience in the orphanage that there was always somebody who wanted to befriend the newcomer, somebody who knew the ropes. So she'd been glad to stroll along the corridor with Mrs. Foster, listening to her talk about the other inmates and the attendants.

"Reid is a good sort but she's strict. Furness is cold as a frozen cod. Try not to cross her. Oh, there's poor Miss Green. She thinks she's related to Her Majesty, a distant cousin or some such. Do give her a nod; she gets very upset if you snub her."

Peg wanted to ask Mrs. Foster why she herself was in the asylum but she knew it was best to wait. She'd find out sooner or later.

She put her hands between her knees to warm them. There was a steam radiator in the room, but there was a strong draft blowing from the window and the cotton quilt on the bed was thin. What time was it? The blinds were lowered, shutting out all light, but she sensed that it was close to morning. There was a night candle on the window sill and it had burned low.

She felt wide awake now. Ever since she could remember, at times of great distress, she couldn't sleep. Paradoxically, she felt worse if she was sharing the room or bed with

somebody else. The sound of the regular breathing of the sleeper created more and more anxiety. She was awake in a world that slept; she was abnormal in a normal world. When she was in the cottage home, she never dared to wake one of the other girls, afraid of possible anger, and she had slept so badly for weeks that finally the matron had prescribed a daily tonic, convinced that the dark circles underneath Peg's eyes were from anaemia. Later, when she was married to Harry, desperate, ready to risk wrath if it meant somebody would talk to her, she had awakened him. He was always impatient, didn't understand, and soon turned away, putting his pillow over his head to shut her out.

There was a sound from the other bed. She raised her head. Mrs. Foster had gotten out of bed. She trotted over to Mrs. Mallory and opened the door of her bedside cupboard. Then she realised Peg was watching her and she stopped, glancing over her shoulder with a mischievous grin.

"She had some bonbons," she whispered. "She won't eat them and she's always offering them to me. I was feeling a bit peckish." She reached in and helped herself to one of the candies, popped it into her mouth, and took another handful.

"Do you want one?"

"No, thank you," said Peg.

Mrs. Foster scampered back to her own bed and stashed the stolen candy in her own cupboard.

"Good night, dear."

She was so childlike in her pleasure and lack of guilt that Peg smiled. She wanted to go on talking, to engage her, but the older woman immediately pulled up her quilt and turned over.

Peg curled up tighter, trying to will herself into sleep. She must have been lying like that for a while when she heard the soft creaking of footsteps outside the door. There was a gleam of light through the small window and she heard the key turn in the lock. Somebody came into the room with a

lamp, sweeping it back and forth over the beds. The person came nearer to her and she could hear wheezing in the chest. It was the night attendant, Reid. Her skirt rustled as the hem dragged on the rush matting. The light became brighter and Peg knew she was standing next to her bed, watching. She rolled over onto her back.

“Oh dear, Mrs. Eakin, not asleep?”

“I was, the light woke me.”

“Try to go back to sleep. It’s not time to get up yet.”

“Yes, Mrs. Reid.” She closed her eyes obediently, listening as the other woman checked on the remaining occupants. She heard her blow out the night candle, then she left, locking the door behind her.

Peg sat up and waited until her eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, then she swung her legs over the side of the bed. She hitched up her nightgown. When she arrived she had been issued a flannel gown and a grey dressing robe, both too large for her.

“When you’re feeling better, you can wear your own clothes,” said the matron. “Your gown did need to be laundered,” she added, and Peg knew that she must have been filthy when she’d been admitted.

Keeping her in nightclothes ensured she was conspicuous and vulnerable. The better you behaved, the better you were treated and the more privileges you got. Peg had soon realised the asylum was run on very similar principles to the orphanage where she’d grown up.

She went quietly over to the window. The sash was stiff but she managed to push it open. There were bars that smelled metallic and they were cold and wet with rain. She knew she was on the third floor and, as she sniffed the damp night air, she caught the smell of livestock. She must be facing the south side of the building, which overlooked the vegetable gardens and stables. Mrs. Foster had told her proudly that the asylum tried to be as self-sufficient as possible and that they raised pigs and a few milch cows.

"The bacon's really quite excellent," said the old lady with glee.

Suddenly, Miss Anderson sat bolt upright.

"Good morning," she said to Peg in a loud voice. "How are you, Annabel?"

Miss Anderson called everybody Annabel, which was apparently the name of the family household maid, long since dead.

"I'm very well, thank you."

Miss Anderson burst into song.

"Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war ..."

She was well launched into the first verse when the two other women in the room both woke up. Mrs. Foster called out, "Please be quiet over there. I'm trying to sleep."

Miss Anderson was oblivious and began to sing louder. "With the cross of Jesus going on before."

Mrs. Foster glared, then flung back her covers and jumped out of bed. Before Peg realised what she intended, she ran over to Miss Anderson and attempted to put a hand over her mouth.

"I'll make you be quiet, then, you silly canary."

The older woman grabbed at the hand across her mouth, trying to pry the fingers loose. Mrs. Foster wasn't big but she was much more vigorous than her victim. She started to push her back into the pillows.

"I'll shut you up once and for all."

Her ferocity was so alarming, Peg had to do something. She rushed over and tried to pull her away.

"Stop it! Come on now, stop it."

The woman let go and turned her fury on Peg. Her fingernails hadn't been cut for some time and the claws aimed straight for Peg's cheeks. She would have inflicted a serious injury, but Peg managed to grab her by the wrists and keep her at bay.

Next to them, Miss Anderson was trilling at full voice. "Forward into battle, see His banners go."

Mrs. Foster was trying to get at Peg's face, spitting at her and kicking. Her toenails were likewise untrimmed and she scratched Peg's shins badly. Suddenly, the door opened and Reid swept in.

"What's going on in here? Stop that at once. Mrs. Foster! Let go of her, Mrs. Eakin."

Peg grunted, too intent on protecting herself to answer. The attendant caught hold of Mrs. Foster's arms from behind and, quickly and expertly, spun her around and two paces back.

"Mrs. Eakin, please get into bed," she managed to call over her shoulder. Panting, Peg retreated and at that moment another attendant who had heard the noise came hurrying into the room. Reid was holding Mrs. Foster tightly but she was bucking and struggling like a wild creature. Miss Anderson sang on. The second attendant went straight over to her, took out a strip of linen from her pocket and in one swift movement, bound it around Miss Anderson's mouth. She made no attempt to remove the gag, but continued to sing in a much muffled way, staring at the ongoing struggle between Reid and Mrs. Foster. Abruptly, the fight stopped; Mrs. Foster went limp and sagged in the attendant's arms. Reid spoke to her soothingly.

"That's my good girl. Shush now."

The fourth occupant of the room, Mrs. Mallory, had covered her head with her quilt but she was moaning to herself. Reid led Mrs. Foster back to her bed.

"Are you going to be good, now? I don't have to tie you down, do I?"

"No, dear, not me." She pointed at Peg. "It's her who's the troublemaker. Tie her down."

Peg shrank back, shaking her head. "Please, I was just trying to help Miss Anderson. Mrs. Foster was hurting her." She spoke in her best English manner. "She began to sing and Mrs. Foster got angry."

“And why shouldn’t I?” interjected the other woman. “That’s the third time this week she’s started bellowing and woken us all up. Listen to poor Mrs. Mallory over there.”

The two attendants exchanged glances and Mrs. Reid went over to Miss Anderson, who immediately became silent.

“It’s too early to be singing. You’re just being naughty. You can sing after dinner. Now do you promise to be a good girl and go back to sleep?”

Miss Anderson nodded, her blue eyes wide and bright above the gag. The attendant removed the linen strip from her mouth. She waited until the elderly woman lay down, patted her lightly on the head, and went back to Mrs. Foster’s bed. She brought her face so close their noses were almost touching.

“You will not move a muscle until morning bell or you will have only bread for breakfast. And tomorrow is Wednesday and it’s ham. You know how much you like ham, don’t you?”

Mrs. Foster nodded. “I have to use the commode.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, it’s coming fast.”

Reid sighed. “Very well.” She turned to the other attendant. “Thank you, Mrs. Furness, I think we’ll be all right. I’ll keep her with me until morning.”

“What about that one?” Furness indicated Peg, talking as if she were invisible.

“I just want to get back to sleep, if you don’t mind.” She suited her actions to her words and quickly got into bed and under the covers. Her legs were stinging from the scratches but she wasn’t about to add to the trouble by mentioning it.

Reid, who was the senior of the two, was satisfied, and holding Mrs. Foster by the arm, she led her away to the water closet. Furness wagged her finger in a warning at Peg and followed.

The room seemed to rock as unsteadily as a dinghy in the wake of a steamer. Peg lay staring at the ceiling.

Be calm. Think! You've got to think!

Chapter Fourteen

THE CHAPEL AT HUMPHREY'S FUNERAL HOME was used regularly for coroner's inquests because the post mortem examination could be easily conducted on the premises. The room was panelled in dark oak with a sober brown carpet and pews. A large portrait of Her Majesty and the prince consort, surrounded by their young children, was hung at the front of the room. Murdoch assumed Mr. Humphrey had chosen this particular reproduction because of the family aspect. Queen Victoria and Prince Albert as a source of parental comfort to the bereaved.

The chapel could comfortably hold about forty people but there were at least sixty jammed into the room, extra benches having been provided. Word had spread about Wicken's death and Murdoch also recognised many of the people he had been questioning the previous day. There were four or five constables from the station and Inspector Brackenreid himself was present. He was looking quite disgruntled and Murdoch knew he considered Wicken to have brought disgrace to the force and particularly his station. He gave a curt nod as the detective went to take his seat near the front with the other witnesses.

In the first pew were the thirteen jurors. Murdoch slipped into the aisle seat in the second row and was almost knocked over by the various odours of camphor, violet pomade, and shaving soap. Several of the men had cleaned themselves up and taken out their Sunday-best suits, as befitted their important role in the proceedings.

Across from him was Oliver's mother. She was in deep mourning and a heavy crepe veil fell to her shoulders. Her head was bowed and she was very still. She didn't

acknowledge anyone and she seemed alone and friendless, even though there was a woman next to her who Murdoch assumed was a neighbour. She too was in black and he saw her wiping her eyes with a black-edged handkerchief. Mrs. Wicken was not weeping.

Beside the neighbour was the patrol sergeant Hales, who had to testify, and next to him was a young woman that Murdoch didn't recognise. She was soberly dressed in a dark grey walking suit and plain black felt hat with a short veil to the chin. He wondered if this was the woman that Wicken had apparently died for. She seemed to be alone and her head was bowed in prayer. He could imagine what an ordeal the inquest was going to be for her.

The spectators were behaving with respect and there was only a subdued murmur as they waited for the proceedings to start. A table had been placed at the front of the chapel for the coroner and the constable of the court. The side door opened and Crabtree strode in, followed by Mr. Johnson.

"Oyez! Oyez! Everybody please rise."

There was a rustling of garments and creaking of seats as the spectators obeyed.

"An inquisition is now in session, taken for Our Sovereign Lady, the Queen, at the house of Benjamin Humphrey, situate in the city of Toronto in the county of York on the thirteenth day of November in the fifty-eighth year of the reign of Our Sovereign Lady, Victoria, before Arthur Edward Johnson, Esquire, one of the coroners of our said Lady to inquire when, how, and by what means Oliver Wicken came to his death. All of the jurors here present being duly sworn and having viewed the body."

Johnson took his seat behind the table.

"Everyone may now sit."

Crabtree's booming voice filled the chapel. There was an expectant silence; nevertheless, the constable picked up the rubber mallet on the desk and banged it. He addressed the jurors.

“Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! You good men of this county, answer to your names as you shall be called, every man at the first call, upon pain and peril that shall fall thereon.”

He checked off their names as they answered.

Johnson waited impassively for Crabtree to finish, staring at a spot three feet in front of him. The roll call finished, he blinked and spoke out in his raspy nasal voice.

“I shall proceed to hear and take down the evidence respecting the fact, to which I crave your particular attention.”

He nodded at Crabtree who turned slightly to face the row where the witnesses sat. Murdoch felt a slight quiver of stage fright in his stomach. Crabtree declaimed, “If anyone can give evidence on behalf of our Sovereign Lady the Queen, when, how, and by what means Oliver Wicken came to his death, let him come forth and he shall be heard.”

He beckoned to Patrol Sergeant Hales, who stood up and approached the table.

“State your name, place of abode, and occupation.”

“Edward Hales, number fifty, Sydenham Street. I am night patrol sergeant at number four police station, which is located on Wilton Street.”

“That your full name?”

“No, sir. My full name is Edward George Wilbur Hales.”

“Say so then. This is her Majesty’s court now convened.”

Johnson frowned at the rest of the witnesses as if they too had transgressed. Crabtree waited until the coroner had finished entering the information in his ledger, then picked up the Bible that was on the desk and held it out. Hales took it in his right hand.

“The evidence which you shall give to this inquest on behalf of our Sovereign Lady the Queen touching the death of Oliver Wicken shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. So help you God. Do you so swear?”

“I do.”

“Stand over there and address the coroner and make sure the jurors can hear you.”

Hales moved so that he was at an angle to the court.

“Constable, second class, Oliver Wicken went on duty at a quarter to seven on the night of Monday last, the eleventh of November ...”

“Don’t gabble,” interrupted Johnson. “I have to write this down, you know.”

Hales continued, trying to speak more slowly. “I did my first check at twenty-five minutes past eight at the corner of Queen and River streets. The second was at twenty past ten when I met up with him at Parliament Street. Constable Wicken was present and correct. He was not under the influence of liquor. He showed me his report book and to that point his beat had been without incident.”

“Did he seem in any way morose or dispirited?”

“No, sir, he did not.”

“Other than giving his report, did he say anything to you?”

“Just about the weather.”

“His exact words, if you please, Sergeant.”

“I can’t say as I remember them exactly, sir. Something like, ‘Good weather if you’re a duck. I’ll be glad to be done.’”

“In your opinion was there anything at all in Mr. Wicken, either that night or on any other previous occasion, that would have indicated a man with suicidal tendencies?”

“Absolutely not. He was always a good-natured fellow, never whinged like some of them do. I would say he was of a cheerful disposition. And if I might add, Mr. Johnson, in all my experience as a police officer, I have never known a pistol to end up stuck between a man’s legs in the way it was found ...”

Johnson stopped him. “Members of the jury, I should remind you that we demonstrated this point to our mutual satisfaction. The gun could in fact fall into that position. I am not suggesting this would happen every time. Of course not. We are not talking about an arcade. But there is quite

sufficient probability. However, Patrol Sergeant Hales is entitled to his opinion. Nobody wants to accept the fact that a fellow officer was a weakling."

Murdoch could see Mrs. Wicken had bent her head and he cursed Johnson for his lack of tact.

The sergeant had turned even redder than usual. "I returned to the station to make my report and went out again at about two o'clock. At this time I did not encounter the constable, who should have been in the vicinity of Gerrard Street east between Parliament and River streets. I went around his beat the reverse way expecting to meet him but he was nowhere visible. I returned to the station."

"Hold on," said Johnson. "Why didn't you sound the alarm?"

Hales hesitated. "Sometimes the younger constables liven up the dullness of the watch by playing tricks - harmless, sir, quite harmless and don't affect their duty at all. Monday was a drear, wet night."

"What sort of harmless little tricks, pray tell?"

The sergeant shifted uncomfortably. "Sort of hide-and-seek. They might duck into the laneway when they hear me coming, then jump out as I go past."

"I see. So you thought Constable Wicken was simply playing games with you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Had he done that on other occasions?"

"No, sir. No, he hadn't."

"But this night, as it was, as you say, so drear, you thought he had got it into his head to act like some child with his tutor?"

Hales was stung by Johnson's tone.

"It crossed my mind as an explanation. Wicken was a responsible young fellow. I didn't think there was any harm if he did want a bit of a laugh. I did the rest of my rounds, made my report, and then I went out again at four o'clock. There was no sign of him. At this point I was getting worried.

I started a bit of a search, thought he might have been taken ill and be in one of the laneways. I didn't find him."

"Didn't you think to inspect the empty house?"

"No, sir. For one, there were several vacant properties along the beat, and second, my pebble was still on the doorknob ..."

"Explain if you please, Sergeant."

"Sometimes just to test that the constables are doing what they're supposed to do, I place a pebble on the doorknob of the vacant houses on the beat. It's small so as they can't really see it in the dark but, if it's still there when I come round next, I know they haven't bothered to check."

"And you put a pebble on the doorknob of the Gerrard Street house?"

"Yes, sir. When I went by at two o'clock."

"Did you do the same to the back door?"

"No, sir."

"So when did you finally decide something might be seriously the matter?"

"When Wicken hadn't shown up at the end of his shift or called in. That's when Detective Murdoch offered to go in search of him."

Johnson frowned. "Long after the horse had left the barn, wouldn't you say?"

Murdoch felt like throttling the coroner. He knew that the patrol sergeant had been chastising himself severely. All the "if onlys" tearing at him. Not that it would have made any difference if he had raised the alarm, unless he'd happened on Wicken in the act of aiming his revolver at his own head.

"You can step down, Sergeant. Constable of the court, call the next witness."

"Acting Detective William Murdoch, please come forward to be sworn."

Hales went back to his seat and Murdoch stood up and went to the table. He tried to give Hales a sympathetic glance as they passed but the sergeant averted his eyes.

He made sure to give his full name of William Henry Murdoch, then Crabtree handed him the Bible and swore him in.

Johnson laced his fingers together and cracked his knuckles.

“Address the jury and give your statement. Please be clear and precise.”

Murdoch faced the jurors, who were still highly attentive, and related his discovery of Wicken’s body. Most of this ground had already been covered at the viewing, so there were no questions. He assumed he had been clear enough.

“Do you yourself have an opinion as to the manner of death?”

“I do not, sir. I have known Constable Wicken for some time and, like Sergeant Hales, I have always found him to be uncommonly even-tempered. It is hard to conceive of him committing such a violent act as self-murder. However, the situation in which I found him does seem to indicate that is the case. I am frankly puzzled by it.”

“Are you indeed? Well, as I remarked to the sergeant, we are not visiting an arcade. Men do not function like mechanical pieces. Perhaps any one of us is capable of irrational acts at times in our lives when we are unbalanced by our passions.”

There was no answer to that.

“You can step down, Mr. Murdoch.”

Johnson addressed the jurors. “There was a post mortem examination of the body conducted by Dr. Grieg, a licenced physician. Unfortunately, he is not able to be here in person today but I do have his written report. Members of the jury, you will be able to study this said report when you are deciding on your verdict, but I will ask the constable of the court to read it out for the benefit of the rest of the people here present.”

Crabtree did so, handling the medical terminology remarkably well. “... The anterior fossa of the base of the

skull was much shredded. The base of the brain was torn and lacerated almost to a pulp ... in the interior of the brain was a piculet of bone about the size of three quarters of an inch long and one half an inch broad ..." Again, Murdoch felt bad for Oliver's mother. No matter how Latinate the language, what she was listening to was a description of her son's head being shattered.

Crabtree concluded with "... abdominal organs healthy. Heart healthy."

The only new piece of information for Murdoch was that Wicken had eaten shortly before he died. There was partially digested meat and bread in his stomach.

"Thank you, Constable. Mr. Samuel Lee is our next witness, I believe. Please swear him. His son will act as interpreter."

Crabtree called out their names and the two Chinamen approached the desk. There was a murmur from the spectators, many of whom had probably never seen such a sight.

Both of the men were wearing padded silk jackets of red silk embroidered with green and gold thread. On their heads were black tri-cornered hats. They were like exotic birds among the sparrows and crows. And the rustle of whispers expressed a rather hostile curiosity.

Johnson said to the young man, "State your name and address first, then his, and the constable will swear him in."

The son's name was Foon. "This is my father, Samuel Lee. We live at number two hundred plus twenty-four on Parliament Street. We run the laundry."

There was a giggle from somebody in the crowd and Murdoch guessed it was because of Foon's accent.

Crabtree took a flat box from the desk and lifted out a china saucer.

"Tell Mr. Lee he must kneel down."

Foon translated and rather stiffly his father obeyed. Crabtree handed him the saucer. Bewildered, the Chinaman

took it in his hand.

"Instruct him he must break the saucer in two," said Crabtree. "He can smash it on the floor if he likes."

A short, fast exchange took place between Foon and his father, and with a slight shrug, Mr. Lee slammed the saucer hard, breaking it in two.

"Now repeat to him the following," said the constable. "You shall tell the truth and the whole truth. The saucer is cracked and, if you do not tell the truth, your soul will be cracked like the saucer."

Foon translated.

"Does he understand?"

Lee nodded.

"You can stand up now," said Johnson.

Crabtree picked up the broken pieces and returned them to the box.

The audience had watched this ritual as avidly as if they were at a magic show. The coroner looked at Lee. "As a witness in this investigation you are required to tell the jury exactly what you told the detective when he came to question you yesterday."

Foon repeated what he'd said and his father answered animatedly. Foon translated it all back into English. When he mentioned seeing a young woman with Wicken, a ripple of excitement ran through the crowd. When he had finished, Stevenson put up his hand.

"What now?" asked the coroner in exasperation.

"Just want to make sure the gentleman knows what he is saying. That there's no mistake. How did he know for certain it was twenty minutes past eleven o'clock when Constable Wicken came to the door?"

Lee spoke at once to his son.

"My father says he looked at the clock, wondering who was coming so late."

"He tells the time, then, does he?"

Johnson saved Foon the embarrassment of a reply.

"Mr. Stevenson, you are revealing an appalling ignorance. The Chinese invented clocks, isn't that so, Mr. Foon?"

"Ay, sir."

There was a titter at Stevenson's expense but Murdoch had the impression most of the listeners were surprised to hear this.

"Any other questions for the witness?"

Jarius Gibb, the foreman, indicated he had one.

"In the opinion of the Chinaman, was the constable in low spirits or good spirits?"

Foon translated and his father paused for a moment before he answered.

"My father regrets to say he could not distinguish what sort of demeanour the constable was in. Nor the lady. But he must emphasize, he only glimpsed them as they walked up the street together."

"Talking or not talking?"

"He believes talking."

The coroner consulted a sheet of paper in front of him. "He can step down but he is still sworn. Remind him, Mr. Foon. Call the next witness."

"Miss Mary Ann Trowbridge, please come forward."

The young woman edged her way along the row. As she crossed in front of Mrs. Wicken, she hesitated, made as if to reach out her hand, thought better of it, and went on.

Crabtree swore her in and she answered in a soft, light voice.

"Give your statement, Miss Trowbridge," said Johnson. "And please speak up; I won't bite."

She nodded but more volume seemed beyond her and Murdoch had to strain to hear.

"I am, that is to say, I was betrothed to Oliver Wicken." She glanced over at Mrs. Wicken. "It was a secret betrothal. Nobody knew, not even his mother. We became engaged two months ago but ..." She stopped, swallowing back tears.

"On Monday evening I broke off our engagement. Oh, if only I hadn't." Her voice trailed off.

"You really must speak louder, my dear young lady. The jurors need to hear you." Johnson was being most solicitous.

Miss Trowbridge lifted her veil to wipe her eyes and Murdoch had a good view of her face. She was a pretty girl with fair skin and light-coloured brows. Her eyes were well shaped, blue or grey, and her chin was rounded. He judged her to be less than twenty.

"Oliver was most upset. He begged me not to abandon him ... He said his life was nothing without me. I was dreadfully worried but I could not go back on my decision. I felt we were not suited to each other and that eventually he would be happier with another. He did not think so ... We quarrelled dreadfully."

"Did he make threats at that time to take his own life?" Johnson asked.

Mary Ann nodded. She reached into her reticule and took out a folded piece of paper.

"I live with my aunt, Mrs. Avison. She would have come here today but she is in poor health. However, she wrote out a letter to you, Your Honour. I spoke to her the moment I returned home, so she can vouch for what I said."

Johnson took the missive, scanned it quickly, and put it into the folder that was on his desk.

"So, the last time you saw Oliver Wicken was this Monday past?"

"Yes, that is correct."

"And where did you see him?"

"I must confess, your Honour, I met him on his beat. I know I should not have done this as he was on duty but ... I felt safer. I did not think he would dare to pursue me. So I arranged to meet him in the empty house. I knew he had the key because he'd begged me to meet him there before which I had not done ... When we were inside, in the former kitchen, I told him my intention ... He became very angry.

He began to shout at me, dreadful cruel things ... I was afraid he would actually strike me. I ran off ..." She was having a hard time speaking. "I wish now I had stayed, tried to talk to him until he was in a more reasonable frame of mind, but I was afraid ..."

Suddenly, Mrs. Wicken burst out, "That girl is not telling the truth. Oliver was not like that. He would never have become engaged without informing me."

Her voice was harsh and she was panting as if she had been running. Unnecessarily, Johnson thumped the table with the mallet.

"Order please. Mrs. Wicken, I do appreciate your distress but you cannot call out like that. This is a law court. If you wish to make a statement, you have to be properly sworn. Is that what you want?"

Her neighbour touched her arm and whispered at her but Mrs. Wicken shrugged her off.

"Yes. I would like to testify."

"Very well. When Miss Trowbridge has finished you can come up. But I must ask you to control yourself. I will not allow any hysterics."

He turned back to the young woman. "Do continue."

She wiped at her eyes again. "I'm sorry, sir. I cannot bear to upset Oliver's mother in this way but I can't lie because of that, can I?"

"Absolutely not. Is there anything else you want to add?"

"No, sir. That's all that happened. He must have remained in the house until ... until he ..."

"That's all right, Miss Trowbridge. We understand. Now, does any member of the jury have a question? Oh no, Mr. Stevenson, not again?"

"Yes, sir. I just wanted to know how long this encounter lasted."

The girl answered. "Not long. Ten or twelve minutes at the most. As I said, I was afraid and I left as soon as I could."

"And what time of night was this?"

"I'm afraid I can't say exactly. I don't carry a watch. It was after midnight, I believe."

"One more question, Miss. Isn't that very late for a young woman to be out unescorted?"

She turned to Johnson. "Would it be too much to ask for a glass of water?"

"Of course not." There was a glass and a carafe of water on the table, and Johnson poured some out and handed the glass to the young woman. She sipped some of the water.

"I'm sorry, sir, what was your question?"

Stevenson repeated it.

"You are quite right, sir, and believe me I would not have done such a thing if I were not desperate. As I mentioned, my aunt is in ill-health and I am the sole watcher. I could not leave her any earlier. But where I live isn't too far away and I hurried as fast as I could."

Miss Trowbridge was looking more and more frightened. Murdoch wished for her sake that the ordeal was over.

Chamberlin waved his hand. "One question, sir ... Ma'am, how did you find out what had happened to the constable?"

"I read about it in the newspaper this morning. I came directly to the coroner, as I thought it was my duty to say what had occurred, even though there were those who might blame me."

"Nobody of a reasonable mind would blame you, Miss Trowbridge," said Johnson.

Murdoch thought he was acting like a besotted old fool and it added to the list of grievances he held against the man.

Gibb indicated he had a question. "Miss Trowbridge, had Wicken shown any previous signs of mental instability?"

"I regret to say that he did. If I even had a cross word for him, which was not often, he would become distraught. He said he could not rest until I had forgiven him. He was horribly jealous and made mountains out of molehills over everything ... That is why I broke off our engagement. I

know he didn't show that part of his nature to the world, but please believe me, I saw it all too often."

"I think we've heard what we need," said Johnson. "You may return to your seat, Miss Trowbridge."

She did so, this time ignoring Oliver's mother.

Johnson pulled out a large gold watch from his waistcoat pocket and consulted it.

"We will hear from Mrs. Wicken."

She stood up, swayed for a moment on her feet. Murdoch was afraid she was going to fall. But she held tightly onto the back of the pew in front of her until she was composed and then she approached the table. When Crabtree swore her in her voice was audible, in spite of the encumbering veil.

Johnson nodded at her and ostentatiously dipped his pen at the ready for her statement.

"I know of no such engagement entered into by my son and I am entirely unacquainted with Miss Trowbridge. However, even if Oliver were betrothed to her, I cannot believe for a moment he would kill himself because she rejected him. From an early age, Oliver was a sensible boy."

In spite of the sympathy that was her due as bereaved mother, Mrs. Wicken was not endearing herself to the spectators. Her composure, which had momentarily deserted her, was now firmly in place and Murdoch knew that most of those listening would see her as unnatural and unfeeling. They far preferred a story of love and passion and the evidence of heartbreak that Miss Trowbridge had given them. However, he knew how Mrs. Wicken had reacted when she'd heard of her son's death and his heart went out to her.

The indomitable Stevenson raised his hand again and Johnson nodded permission for him to speak. "Excuse me, ma'am, for asking, but was your son's life insured?"

"Yes, it was. After my husband died, Oliver became the sole support of me and his sister. We took out modest

policies for both of us.”

“Thank you, that is all.”

He didn’t have to press the point. Everybody knew that, if it was determined that Wicken had killed himself, there would be no payout from the insurance company.

“I myself wish to ask one thing, Mrs. Wicken,” said Johnson. “I commiserate with you most sincerely but this is a court of law and you are sworn under oath to tell the truth ... you do understand that, don’t you?”

“Of course.”

“Did your son show any signs of a melancholy disposition at any time prior to his death?”

“No, he did not. Never.”

“Thank you, madam. That is all.”

Tall and erect she returned to her seat.

Stevenson’s hand was in the air immediately.

“I’d like to ask the previous witness, Mr. Lee, a question, Your Honour.”

Johnson sighed. “Is this the last?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Very well. Mr. Foon, please tell your father to stand up. Remind him he is under oath.”

Foon spoke to his father and he obeyed the instruction.

“I do want to make it clear, Your Honour, that I mean no disrespect to Miss Trowbridge in any way at all,” said Stevenson. “This is strictly for confirmation, you understand ...”

“Spit it out, man. We don’t have all day.”

“Mr. Lee, is the young woman who has here testified the same person that you saw when Oliver Wicken came to your laundry? Miss, would you be so good as to stand and raise your veil again. Thank you.”

Mr. Lee regarded her for a few moments, then spoke quickly to his son. Foon nodded.

“My father says that is of certainty the young woman he saw on the street with the constable.”

A sigh of gratification went through the room. Mrs. Wicken only sat straighter.

Johnson banged the mallet on the table. "We will adjourn for fifteen minutes."

Crabtree stepped forward. "Court, please rise."

With much shuffling and scuffling of boots, the spectators stood up while Johnson left.

Chapter Fifteen

THE JURORS WERE SEATED AROUND a table in the viewing room of the funeral parlour. On two shelves at the back were displayed empty coffins, the quality ranging from expensive polished oak lined with white satin to plain pine with no brass and thin cotton lining. At first these eternity boxes had served as silent *memento mori*, but now they had assumed the same invisibility as a sideboard.

The men had taken out their pipes and the air was thick.

"Has everybody now read over the witness statements?" asked Gibb. There were murmurs of agreement.

Gain, a porter, called out, "Wonder if they could bring us a bite, Mr. Gibb? It's past my dinner time and my belly is starting to eat itself." There were some grins at this. Thomas Gain was a stout man with heavy jowls and an abundant stomach. "And as for Peter Curran here," he continued, "his is growling so loud I can't hear the half of what's being said."

The man beside him answered before Gibb could respond.

"If you want to eat, you'd better hurry up and settle the verdict. They're not going to give us anything until you come to a decision. It's the rule." His name was James Slade and he owned a grocery store on Jarvis Street. He wasn't at all happy at being subpoenaed to serve on the jury, but at the least he thought he should have been foreman, given the social standing of his clientele. He spoke in a condescending tone that had already set the rest of them on edge.

"That used to be the practice, Mr. Slade," said Gibb, "but I don't believe it's the case nowadays. If you men want some refreshment, I'll order it right away."

“They won’t, you’ll see.”

Stevenson, who was next to him, groaned, glanced around for somewhere to spit, caught Gibb’s eye, and refrained.

“Can we at least have a jug or two of Dominion?” asked John Shaw, who was a coal merchant. His jacket and flannel shirt were clean enough, but around his neck and wrists the skin was dark with coal dust. He considered it weakened you to bathe more than once a month. A tarry odour of coal emanated from him but it wasn’t totally unpleasant. Better than the smell of hides coming from Emery Nixon, the tanner.

“Why don’t we just get on with it? Cast our vote now,” said Chamberlin, who was an avid temperance man.

“You’re the one who’s been insisting on going over everything like you’re combing your head for lice,” interjected Jabez Clarke. “In my view the constable was a silly arse lad who thought it mattered what woman you get a bit of dock with. As for me, I’m as confused as a priest in a brothel. In other words, gentlemen, soon as the lassie with the lovely tiddies stood up, I knew at once where to put my vote – and my member.” Clarke was a corset salesman for Mr. Simpson’s store. Perhaps in reaction to the need to be constantly deferential and discreet, when in male company he was unremittingly vulgar. Some of the men considered him a wag, some did not.

“Show some respect, Mr. Clarke,” said Gibb.

“No offence meant.” He flicked his heavy moustache, which was an unnaturally black tint, as was his thick, glossy hair.

Gibb laid down his pipe and picked up the ledger where he’d been taking notes.

“Is everybody ready then?”

A chorus of “ays” but one man shook his head.

“I hate to see the lad’s mother destitute. And she will be if she don’t get that insurance money,” said Mr. Bright, an

elflike man with large ears. He was a druggist who had his shop on Parliament Street.

"I feel the same way," said Gibb, "but our job is to find the truth and we must present that unflinchingly. I'm afraid we cannot worry about the consequences."

"Why not?" interjected James Slade. "We are decent Christian men after all."

Gibb took a long pull on his pipe but, before he could answer, Chamberlin spoke up.

"Jarius is right. Unpleasant as that may prove to be, our duty is to present the truth as we see it. What happens after that is out of our hands. I say we should vote."

"Hear, hear," agreed Stevenson. "I might even be able to get to work and not be totally out of pocket."

Gain, who was at the far end of the table, waved his pipe to get Gibb's attention.

"There's something niggling at me, Mr. Foreman. It's about the food."

"I promise I'll send for dinner as soon as we're done ..."

"No, I don't mean that. I mean the food the doctor said was in Mr. Wicken's stomach. When did he eat it?"

"I don't quite follow ..."

"According to what I'm looking at here, the constable ate his meat and cheese shortly before he died. If he shot himself at one o'clock, after his sweetheart had given him the push, when did he eat?"

The rest of the jurors were regarding him with some exasperation.

"You would be the one to focus on that," said Slade.

"I'm quite serious. Think about it for a minute. Here's your lady-love breaking it off; you're not going to be munching on your sandwich while she's telling you that. So she leaves; would you eat then? Doesn't seem likely to me. You'd be more likely to go off your feed than not."

"Well, it's obvious you've never been lovelorn, Mr. Gain," said Stevenson, and the others chuckled.

"Thomas has got a point," said Chamberlin. "People have been known to fade away to nothing when they're pining. But usually they're women."

"I've known the exact opposite," said Slade. "One of my customers had a cousin who lost his fiancée in a boating accident. He couldn't stop eating. Built up over fifty pounds in less than a month. It can go either way."

The jurors looked as if they were about to plunge into a lively argument, but Gibb called them to order.

"I thank Mr. Gain for bringing up this matter but we're missing the point. The time of death is approximate. It's impossible to pinpoint exactly. It could be earlier. And Miss Trowbridge was not clear as to when she left Wicken. He probably had plenty of time to polish off his sandwich before he met her." He smiled at them. "And speaking of polishing off, let's do it."

"One thing I can't get off my mind is his mother saying she wasn't aware of a fiancée," said Bright.

"Of course she's going to say that," said Slade. "She don't want a suicide verdict. She needs the money bad." He fished in his waistcoat pocket, pulled out an enamel snuffbox, took a pinch of snuff, and sneezed satisfactorily. "Don't forget, there's an invalid sister to take care of."

"Are you for a verdict of death by his own hand then?" asked Gibb.

"Absolutely. It's crystal clear that's what the fool did."

"The patrol sergeant and the detective seemed to think differently," said Bright.

"They're going to stick with their own, aren't they? Nobody wants to admit a police officer shot himself." Slade shook out another pinch of snuff onto the back of his hand and inhaled it. He didn't offer any around.

"Gentlemen? Other comments?" Gibb asked.

"You haven't said much yourself, Jarius," said Curran. "We'd like to know your views."

Gibb leaned back in his chair, tapping the stem of his pipe on the table. "If it wasn't by his own hand, whose was it by? There's no sign of a fight, or a disturbance. He didn't seem to have any more enemies than normally go to a police officer. He's in that vacant house for no other reason. Think of it, if you were going to do yourself in, where would you go? Not home where your mother is going to find you. You'd want to spare her that. Not at the station where there's people about all the time. You'd want a bit of privacy. Time to compose yourself to meet your Maker. I have to say that it all adds up the same way, no matter what direction I put the sums. He was plunged into a state of extreme melancholy by the rejection of his fiancée. She told us he was of a jealous and highly strung disposition. When she left, he must have stood there mulling things over, getting more and more het up. His mind goes completely, he takes out his revolver and shoots himself. My verdict is for suicide. I'm truly sorry for his mother and wish I could say otherwise but I can't. None of us here present is so old we don't know what it feels like to have a woman turn you down. Am I right in this?"

"Right," said George Griffin, the butcher. He spoke with such vigour, the others stared at him and he squirmed. "I had more backbone than that constable but love sure does put you in a miserable state."

"Shall we take the vote then so Mr. Shaw can have his beer before he faints away? Here's some paper; pens are in that box. Write down 'ay' and the word 'suicide,' or 'nay' and 'cause of death unknown.' Add your name."

He handed around the slips of paper. Inkwells had been placed in front of each place and for a few moments there was only the sound of pens scratching.

Jarius wrote down his own vote and began to collect the slips as the men finished. All were done but one.

"Mr. Griffin, your paper, if you please."

"Coming."

The butcher was not much used to writing and he formed his letters as slowly and carefully as if he were in the classroom. Finally he passed the folded paper to Gibb, who looked at it.

“That’s it then.” Gibb recorded the votes on his sheet and placed them all in an envelope. He got to his feet and addressed the men in front of him, reading from a card. “By a unanimous vote, we the jury here present do upon our oath all say that at the city of Toronto on the eleventh day of November, 1895, from injuries received by a pistol fired by his own hand, the deceased, Oliver Wicken, came to his death.”

“So be it,” added Chamberlin and there was a corresponding murmur of “amens” from the remaining jurors.

Chapter Sixteen

MISS ANDERSON WAS AT THE PIANO , singing and accompanying herself to “Onward Christian Soldiers.” She seemed to have a small repertoire, three hymns at the most, which she had been rotating for the last hour. Immediately after luncheon, all the inmates of the ward had been shepherded into the sitting room. Peg hated it at once. It smelled like an institution – carbolic cleaner and not enough fresh air. The chairs and couches were old and shabby, the plush worn threadbare at the arms. The lamps were lit but to her it seemed as if the entire place, including the inhabitants, existed in a grey wash that leached out colours from clothes and faces.

“... with the cross of Jesus going on before.” Miss Anderson’s voice was cracked but still strong enough to reach the unconverted.

If she plays that tune once more I will surely go stark staring mad .

Realising what she’d just said to herself, Peg had to smile. She got up and walked over to the fireplace where she stood and gazed at the bright, dancing flames, hoping they would burn away the grey film from her eyes. Suddenly she was aware that Shelby, one of the attendants, was watching her. There was something implacable in her attention that made Peg uneasy. So far the attendants had been quite kind but she had the feeling that in this woman’s eyes, once committed as a lunatic, always a lunatic. She was alert for any evidence of what she would see as madness. In spite of the fire, Peg shivered. The knowledge of her own helplessness was cold in her stomach.

There was a tap on her shoulder and she turned around. Mrs. Foster was smiling at her.

"Would you like to take a walk around the room, Mrs. Eakin?"

The older woman seemed to have forgotten totally about their altercation of the previous night and was beaming at her happily. Glad to escape her thoughts, Peg nodded and Mrs. Foster linked arms. They strolled over to the window for all the world as if they were two well-to-do ladies promenading along King Street.

"I'm so glad I have you for a friend," said Mrs. Foster, giving Peg's arm a hard squeeze.

In spite of herself, Peg felt a thrill of pleasure. She had always had trouble making friends. She was too stiff and awkward and gave the impression of being standoffish. For as long as she could remember, she had been trying to understand the subtle signals that seemed to go back and forth between people, making some acceptable and others not.

Miss Green was sitting on the couch next to another attendant, and as they went past she called out in an affronted tone.

"I beg your pardon, I do beg your pardon."

Peg hesitated, not sure what transgression had occurred.

"Bow to her," said Mrs. Foster and bobbed in the other woman's direction.

Peg had already curtsied to Miss Green twice as they passed her in the corridor but she did so again. However, the other woman was not satisfied.

"I beg your pardon," she said in an even more indignant voice. The attendant stood up quickly and interposed herself between them.

"I think it's time for you to write your letters, madam. Her Majesty relies on you."

She led her away to a desk at the far side of the room. Miss Green was well into middle age but she had styled her

hair into side ringlets more suitable for a young woman. She was wearing an out-of-fashion dress of green and blue check taffeta. The bodice was tight and the full skirt was pulled back into a bustle with a drape of blue ruffles that cascaded into a long train.

"Poor woman," said Mrs. Foster. "She gets most upset if she thinks she's been slighted."

"What did I do wrong?"

"I don't know, dear. She's quite changeable on the matter."

Mrs. Stratton, the woman Peg had talked to in the bath, was sitting alone on the window bench. She was oddly dressed in a one-piece loose garment of brown holland. It had legs like a man's trousers and was fastened at the ankles and wrists.

"Good afternoon," said Mrs. Foster. "May I introduce Mrs. Eakin?"

The woman turned her head but gave no sign of recognition.

"I believe we've met," said Peg.

Mrs. Stratton nodded. "Yes, of course. Do you have children?"

Peg recoiled. "I told you yesterday that I did."

"They're all dead, I assume. Murdered no doubt."

She was saved from answering by Mrs. Foster, who pulled at her arm.

"Come on, my dear. Good afternoon to you, Mrs. Stratton." She patted Peg's hand. "Don't mind her. She has ten fine healthy children, seven of them boys, but she fancies they're all dead and that her husband murdered them." She lowered her voice. "It's been brought on by the change. Poor thing, her flushings are very bad."

"Why is she wearing that peculiar outfit?"

"That's what they call an untidy suit. She must be in one of her bad spells. She's worse than any baby during those

times. Wipes her food all over herself. Not to mention her you-know-what."

"How long has she been in the - in here?" Peg couldn't bring herself to say the word "asylum."

"Not that long. She came in last March." Mrs. Foster continued. "She probably should be on the second floor with the really bad patients. It's not nearly as nice as our floor. They don't have any singing or dancing and nobody is allowed sweets." Suddenly, she stroked Peg's cheek. "You don't want to go down there, my dear."

Peg involuntarily moved away from her touch. "I have no intention of doing so."

As they turned back toward the fireplace, the door opened and Miss Bastedo, the matron, and two nurses came in. All the attendants stood up in deference and one or two of the patients followed suit. Miss Bastedo was a tall woman, mature and strong featured. Like the rest of the staff, she wore a plain dress of blue wool but she omitted the apron and the cap. Her dark hair was pulled into a tight knot at the nape of her neck. She began her tour of the room, chatting to the patients as she went. Her assistants walked quietly behind her.

Peg could feel her heart beating faster as she approached. She felt as if she had gone backward to her own girlhood and this was one of the mistresses of the orphanage. Unexpectedly, Mrs. Foster dropped her arm and wandered off in the direction of the hearth, leaving her stranded.

Miss Bastedo halted in front of Peg. "How are you feeling today, Mrs. Eakin? The nurse tells me you are settling down quite nicely."

"Indeed I am, thank you."

"I heard you ate a hearty breakfast this morning."

"Yes, ma'am, I did."

Peg had been ravenous and she'd devoured two servings of ham and toast.

"You wouldn't take your tonic though."

"No, ma'am. I did not feel the need."

"You really must take it. You will feel so much better. All of the other ladies do."

"Yes, ma'am."

The matron's expression was kind. "I understand how new everything must seem. I know you have been very frightened. Tonight, I will come by myself and give you the tonic. And just so you will know it is perfectly safe, I will even have some myself. I could do with it these days. Will that be more acceptable to you?"

"Thank you, ma'am."

Peg had been afraid the tonic contained sedatives and she couldn't bear the drowsy, helpless state they induced.

One of the assistants came forward and said something to the matron.

"Ah, yes. Before your marriage you had the occupation of dressmaker, I understand?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"We encourage our ladies to do some simple occupation while they're with us. It calms the nerves. We have a wonderful sewing room here. Would you like to do something? Embroidery, if you wish. Or we are always in need of garments."

"I would like that, ma'am."

"Excellent. Perhaps on Friday, then, you can go to the sewing room."

"Yes, ma'am."

"And I think you can have day clothes tomorrow. You will have to make do with what the asylum provides for now, but I will send a message to your family to bring in your own clothes."

She was about to move on but Peg reached out and caught her sleeve. Both assistants tensed but Miss Bastedo stayed, looking at her calmly. Peg let her go.

"I was wondering if anybody has been to see me."

"Not yet. On the whole we prefer to see our patients settled in before they have visitors. Are you anxious to see your husband?"

Peg was quite aware that, in spite of the pleasantness of Miss Bastedo's manner, like Shelby, she was watching for any signs of delusions or unnatural behaviour. But she wanted to scream out, *No! Don't let him near me. Don't let any of them near me*. Instead, she bowed her head.

"Yes, ma'am."

Mrs. Foster had wandered back and the matron greeted her warmly.

"I see you've been taking good care of our new arrival."

The old lady beamed. "I most certainly have. She's my dear friend. We were just about to go for a walk down the corridor."

"Very good. And I must continue with my rounds. Good afternoon to you both."

She moved away and Mrs. Foster took Peg's arm.

"My dear, you are trembling. Are you cold?"

"Yes. Yes, I am rather."

There was another attendant sitting by the door. She was round featured and rather jolly looking.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Foster, Mrs. Eakin. Where are you going?"

"Just for a turn down the corridor and back," answered Mrs. Foster. "Matron approves."

"Very well. But don't be gone too long, will you?"

"That's Wylie," said Mrs. Foster as they went outside. "She's a good lassie; never has a cross word for anyone."

They began to walk down the corridor. There were no other patients out there except for one of the charity inmates who was sweeping the floor. She was quite elderly and bent and, as they passed, Peg heard her cough so hard, she had to stop what she was doing and lean on her broom.

"She sounds consumptive," she whispered to Mrs. Foster.

“Oh, she is, my dear. That’s Effie Callahan. She was quite all right when she came in here but she caught the consumption last year from another patient. She’ll probably be gone by spring, you mark my words.”

They walked by her but she didn’t look up.

“Who was it you wanted to see, my dear? Oh, don’t be surprised. Nothing escapes me, especially where my friends are concerned. I myself only want my daughter. She is such a love. She is married now with her own family and she cannot visit as often as she would like. My husband, Mr. Foster, doesn’t approve and hardly ever comes.”

She reached up and pinched Peg’s cheek. “You can tell me.”

But she couldn’t. Her protestations only got her into trouble. A dog that barked and bit was tied up and rendered helpless. It was the silent cat who moved in the darkness that remained free.

“How many grandchildren do you have?” she asked, and Mrs. Foster was diverted and chatted to her merrily until they reached the end of the corridor. Here, there was a pair of double doors. Mrs. Foster made to turn back.

“We can’t go through there.”

“Why not?”

“It leads onto the verandah and we’re only supposed to be there in warm weather.”

Peg tried the door and it wasn’t locked. Mrs. Foster dithered. “We’ll get into trouble.”

“Don’t worry. If anybody scolds, I’ll tell them it was entirely my idea.”

“I’ll wait here then. I’m not allowed.”

Peg pushed open the door and stepped through. The semicircular verandah was quite large and roofed but otherwise open. She drew in her breath sharply. Her flannel wrapper and nightgown were little protection against the chill air. She walked over to the far side and peered through the bars. In the distance, the pewter-coloured lake was

hardly distinguishable from the sky. Below her stretched the sodden garden, denuded now of all vegetables. There was a thin plume of smoke coming from the chimney of the gardener's house and the hominess of it made her want to weep. She pushed up her sleeve and thrust her bare arm through the bars and held it there while the rain wet her skin.

"I don't know what will happen to me if you don't come. Please don't leave me here," she whispered.

"Mrs. Eakin? We should be getting back."

Mrs. Foster had the door partly open and was peering in anxiously. Peg turned.

"I'm coming." She returned to her companion. "There, you see, a little air has done me wonders."

In fact, she was shaking uncontrollably. Mrs. Foster took one of her hands in hers and chafed it briskly.

"My dear, you're so cold. And look at your slippers. They're quite wet. Let's go back to the fire."

She looked into Peg's face, her eyes knowing.

"I heard you say something. Were you praying?"

Peg gave a wry smile. "Yes, I suppose I was."

"That's good, dear. I myself pray all the time."

Chapter Seventeen

THE MOOD AT THE STATION WAS SUBDUED . Everybody felt bad about Wicken, who had been well liked. The discussions were ongoing, but most of the constables were resigned to the verdict and the inexplicable nature of the human mind. Murdoch retired to the cubicle behind the tea room that served as his office. He wasn't in the mood for talking. Mrs. Wicken's devastation haunted him. She had left immediately after the verdict had been delivered and he hadn't had a chance to speak to her again. Mary Ann Trowbridge had departed quickly as well and he hoped she had somebody to comfort her.

With a sigh, he turned to his battered metal filing cabinet. He should look over his old reports at least, see if he could follow up on anything. He took out the folder labelled Piersol, which was a charge of embezzlement against a young clerk who worked for an insurance company. It was a complicated case and Murdoch had to admit he didn't much care about it. Piersol was underpaid and overworked and if he syphoned off some of the considerable profits of the company, good for him. Before Murdoch could go any further with these thoughts, there was a tap outside. His cubicle was too small for a proper door, so visitors had to signal their presence by knocking on the wall. Through the reed curtain, he could see the outline of Sergeant Seymour.

"Come in."

Seymour pushed through into the tiny space.

"Thought you could use a spot of tea." He was carrying a mug, which he held out to Murdoch.

"Thank you, Sergeant."

Murdoch took the mug and sipped at the hot brew.

"Ow."

"Will, you'd better get that tooth looked at. Your jaw is all swollen."

"Yrr, tea'sot."

The sergeant smiled at him. "Listen, it's quiet here this afternoon. I'll book you out early. Go over and see Brodie."

"He's a butcher."

"Maybe, but he does his job."

The hot drink had set up such a clamour in Murdoch's mouth that he could hardly sit still.

"Come on, Will. You can't keep putting it off."

"Yes, I can," said Murdoch, trying to grin.

But the sergeant prevailed and he soon found himself setting off along Wilton Street in search of a dentist, any dentist other than Brodie.

A chill wind was blowing in from the lake and the sky was grey, sunless, threatening more rain to come. He wrapped his scarf around his face. *Are you a miserable coward or not?* he said to himself, and the answer was a loud *Yes*.

He remembered passing a dentist's office not too far from the station on Wilton Street and he decided to try there first. His feet had kept moving and he was now standing in front of a dry-goods shop. Just to the right of the window was a green door that looked newly painted. A shiny brass plaque announced DR. F. STEVENS, DENTIST. 2ND FLOOR. He hesitated. Well, at the least he could look at the place, determine if it looked decent. No blood and discarded teeth on the floor. He opened the door and stepped into a narrow hall which led to a steep flight of stairs. The walls were a cheery yellow tint and the oilcloth floor covering was a flowered pattern. Everything appeared to be well swept and clean. So far so good. Slowly, he mounted the stairs. At the top was a small landing with another green door and another plaque that said PLEASE ENTER. Murdoch paused and touched his sore tooth with the tip of his tongue. The resulting jolt moved

him to open the door. He poked his head around. In front of him was a tiny room with just enough space for a desk and three straight-backed chairs lined up against the wall. A pretty young woman was seated at the desk and at his entrance she rewarded his courage with a welcoming smile.

"Good afternoon, do come in."

She was wearing a sober blue dress with a starched white apron over it and her auburn hair was pinned up beneath a stiff white cap.

"You're here to see the doctor, I presume?"

Murdoch mumbled. "Yes, bad toothache."

She looked at him sympathetically. "I can see your jaw is swollen. But never mind, Dr. Stevens will have you right as rain before you know it."

She stood up and came over to him. "Let me take your things. It's another nasty day, isn't it?"

She hung his hat and his coat on a brass coat stand. Murdoch added the muffler and stood awkwardly waiting. There was some kind of telephone board on the desk and she sat down, plugged in a wire, and leaned closer to the mouthpiece.

"A patient here to see you, Doctor. A Mr....?" She looked up.

"Murdoch, William Murdoch."

She repeated that into the telephone, then held the receiver to her ear. Murdoch heard crackling as the invisible doctor replied. She gave a smile, so quickly suppressed, he wondered what the man had said. He perched on one of the chairs while she took out a large ledger.

"I just need your name, address, and occupation."

He gave her the information.

"Oh, my, a detective. We haven't had one in here before. It must be exciting work."

"Sometimes." He wasn't up to explaining all the different shades of liveliness that his job entailed.

Suddenly, he noticed a shelf behind the desk. Sitting on it was a glass box, inside of which was what looked like a set of teeth. He got up and went closer to investigate. The young woman smiled.

“Those are an old set of dentures. Dr. Stevens collects them. They are what we call ‘Waterloo’ teeth. The back molars are made from ivory but the front teeth were taken from the corpses at the Battle of Waterloo. They were very popular as they are so natural looking. They’re glued to a copper plate.”

“Must have been hard to eat with those things. How did they stay in?”

“There is a little spring at the back. But you’re right, they would be quite uncomfortable and we believe they were only worn for show. Special occasions. I suppose you had to eat as best you could with your gums. Nowadays we have vulcanised rubber that we use for the plate. Much better. People can have all those troublesome teeth removed and hardly know the difference.”

Murdoch thought her glance fell to his lips as if sizing him up as a prospect but just then the door opposite opened and Dr. Stevens came into the waiting room. He too seemed very young and Murdoch’s stomach quailed. He had hoped for an elderly man with much experience who knew what to do, who wouldn’t hurt any more than necessary. Stevens looked to be barely into his mid-twenties. He was tall, clean shaven, with dark-brown hair trimmed close to his head. Seeing Murdoch he stretched out his hand and smiled, revealing perfectly white and even teeth. Murdoch supposed that was a good advertisement and he wondered if they were real. Weakly, he shook hands.

“What can I do for you, sir?”

“I’ve got a bad toothache.” He jabbed his finger in the air, indicating the side of his jaw.

“Ah. Come this way, we’ll have a look.”

The nurse gave a reassuring nod and Murdoch followed the dentist through to the adjoining room. This was larger, with deep windows on two sides. Even with this much light, the afternoon was so gloomy that all the wall sconces had to be lit. In the far corner was a Chinese screen of black lacquer, hiding who knows what instruments of torture. There were two tall oaken cabinets flanking the door. However, what dominated the room was The Chair. It was on a pedestal and stood dead centre.

Stevens walked over to it and patted the backrest invitingly. "Sit here, if you please," as if Murdoch were going to get a haircut.

The chair was covered with plush, burgundy in colour. The better to hide blood stains, he thought. There was a wooden footrest with a Grecian scene painted on it. Probably nymphs chasing Zeus. He climbed in. There was a metal spittoon attached to the arm of the chair. For blood, he assumed.

"Open your mouth wide."

He did and Stevens peered into it. He'd picked up some sharp instrument from another tray without Murdoch noticing and he tapped the gum where all the pain was emanating.

"Ow." Murdoch tried not to make that a bellow.

"Hm. Did that hurt?"

His face was very close to Murdoch's, and at this intimate distance, he saw that the dentist had a small cut on his chin where he'd nicked himself shaving.

"Um," he replied.

"How long have you had the ache?"

"'Bout two weeks."

"Oh, dear, that is a long time. You really should have come in sooner. I'm afraid it looks infected. It will have to come out."

Murdoch's thoughts must have been obvious, because the dentist patted his arm.

"Don't worry. I have all the latest equipment. The extraction will be quite painless."

"How long have you been practising?" Murdoch asked.

Stevens looked disconcerted. "To tell the truth, I graduated from dental college this spring. But I was in the top five of the class."

"How many altogether, six?"

Stevens smiled uneasily and Murdoch himself grinned. "Just a joke, sir. My apologies."

He was afraid to ask him how many patients he'd had. His tooth was throbbing again. Besides, there was something jolly about the man and sympathetic. That must count for a lot surely.

"If that's the only thing to be done, then we'd better do it."

"You'll be glad. Better this than weeks of pain. And an abscess can cause the devil of a lot of problems. Look."

He pointed at his neck just below the jaw and Murdoch saw a rather deep, round scar.

"The result of an abscessed tooth. The infection went right through to the cheek. We didn't have very good dentistry the way we do now. So you see, I know what it's like." Then he shouted, "Inge!"

Almost at once, the door opened and the young woman appeared. So much for fancy telephones.

"This is Mrs., er, Mrs. Stevens. I am proud to say my wife and also my assistant."

She smiled at Murdoch shyly. "Don't worry, it will be over before you know it."

She went behind the Chinese screen and came back with a linen towel that she placed over his chest, tying the ends behind his neck. She had a nice flowery smell about her that he liked. Carnations perhaps. He could hear the dentist rooting around behind him, but he resisted the impulse to turn and investigate. Then Stevens appeared on his left-hand side. He was wheeling a small cart in which sat a long

metal cylinder. There was a rubber tube looped around the top. At the end of the tube was a cone-shaped piece. He manoeuvred the cylinder closer to the chair.

"This is nitrous oxide. You've probably heard it called 'laughing gas.' It's a wonderful discovery, I must say. Most people feel completely euphoric and it utterly takes away pain. Two ticks of the clock and it will be over."

"I saw that stuff used at a music hall show a few years ago," said Murdoch. "It made people do really silly things. Is that going to happen to me?"

Stevens shook his head. "This gas is for medicinal purposes, not entertainment. All that will happen is that you'll go into a pleasant dreamlike state."

"And the alternative?"

"We could administer laudanum or chloral hydrate but those will need an hour or so to take effect."

Murdoch looked at Inge Stevens. Even in her severe cap and uniform there was a soft prettiness to her.

"I'll do the gas," he said.

The dentist nodded at his wife and she went over to the sink in the corner of the room, returning with what looked like a glass of water.

"Swill out your mouth with this and spit it out."

Murdoch did so. The liquid had a strong, tarry kind of taste.

Mrs. Stevens dabbed at his mouth as he sat back in the chair and he was reminded of Mrs. Kitchen wiping away the blood from Arthur's chin. The memory grabbed him and he sighed. Misunderstanding him, the young woman said softly, "You'll probably think I'm prejudiced but Dr. Stevens is really very good. I even let him pull one of my teeth and I didn't feel a thing."

Murdoch hoped this hadn't happened while they were on their wedding trip but he didn't comment, allowing himself to surrender to their administrations. The dentist placed the rubber cone over his nose and mouth.

“Just breathe normally.”

He fiddled with a dial on the cylinder and Murdoch heard the soft hiss of the gas.

“I’m going to count backward from ten. Nice easy breaths now. Don’t gasp. All right, here we go ... Ten ... nine ... eight ...”

Murdoch’s head was beginning to spin as if the top part were rotating like a top. For a moment he wanted to fight it off, get back his control, but Inge touched his forehead and he relaxed. The spinning sensation stopped and he felt as if he were floating up, way up in the sky.

“Three ... two ... one.”

He started to have a lovely dream about dancing with Liza, a waltz that he was executing effortlessly. He tried to tell her how beautiful she looked in her new white silk gown, but he had a big piece of apple in his mouth and it got in the way. He tried to roll it off his tongue but a pip stabbed him sharply. He struggled again to get rid of the fruit and suddenly it was gone. Liza was speaking to him, “Mr. Murdoch, Mr. Murdoch,” and he wondered why she was being so formal.

“Wake up, Mr. Murdoch. Wake up. We’re all done.”

He opened his eyes. Two rather anxious-looking faces were hovering above him. Dr. Stevens had nice brown eyes, he noticed, with girlishly long eyelashes. Inge’s eyes were an unusual hazel colour. Both of them beamed. “They should kiss each other,” he thought. He felt so happy that they were happy. Perhaps they should kiss him too. He smiled and felt something wet run down his chin.

“Oops,” said Mrs. Stevens, and she quickly wiped away whatever it was.

“Tooth’s out,” said Stevens. “Do you want to see it?”

“Why not.”

The dentist had been holding the tooth behind his back and he whipped it forward and held it under Murdoch’s nose. He’d used some kind of device that close up

resembled a medieval thumbscrew. The ring at the end had been slipped over the tooth and then twisted. The bloody prize was firmly in its grasp.

"The infection had made the gum spongy so it lifted out like a carrot," he said. "Now you can sit there for a while longer until the gas has worn off. Told you, didn't hurt a bit, did it?"

"I didn't feel a thing," said Murdoch. He grinned broadly. What wonderful parents they will make. He wanted to put his head on the dentist's shoulder and have it stroked. Either that or curl up in Inge's lap and be rocked.

"Your gum will be sore for a few days. I've packed the hole with some absorbent cotton and you can take it out in a couple of days when the bleeding has stopped. But if it's still bad by tomorrow, come by and I'll fix it."

"Like Medusa, you mean?"

Stevens looked puzzled, but he smiled politely and waited for Murdoch to stop laughing at his own joke.

"We'll give you some laudanum and some antiseptic to rub on it. Now I should tell you that while you were under I had a check on your other teeth and you've got some bad cavities developing. When this has healed, you should come back and I'll fill them."

"Fill them?"

"Well, I can extract them if you prefer but these days we are recommending filling. Gold is good. It'll last you a lifetime."

"Can you sit up now, Mr. Murdoch?" Inge asked. He sat forward in the chair and then got to his feet rather shakily, enjoying the feeling of her cool hand in his.

"Do you want to keep the tooth?" Stevens asked.

"No, no thanks. It's never been one of my favourites."

They all chuckled, especially Murdoch, who considered he was being quite a wag today. Inge started to escort him back to the other room. At the door was a glass-fronted cabinet and he saw it was filled with shelf after shelf of

denture sets. They were all grinning at him, which made him respond in kind. Outside, in the little anteroom, not even the bill dampened his good humour. He paid up, made an appointment to come in next week, and went down the stairs, armed with his bottles of medicine.

As he headed for home, he had to admit he felt happy. The experience hadn't been nearly as bad as he'd expected. Amazing what developments had happened in the last few years. He splashed vigorously through a puddle. Yes, indeed, he would recommend young Forbes to anyone that asked. No, that wasn't right. His name was Stevens. And his lovely wife was Inge. Such an adorable smile she had, such gentle hands. A wife to be proud of. Suddenly he thought of Enid. He'd have to tell her the story of the denture sets. That would make her laugh. She had good teeth, just slightly crooked on the lowers. Perhaps she would go to Stevens as well. He chuckled at such a good idea and a passerby, bent under his black umbrella, glanced over at him with some alarm. Murdoch touched the brim of his hat.

"Good afternoon, lovely weather, isn't it?"

The man didn't respond and Murdoch continued on his way. Ahead of him was a particularly large puddle. He aimed for it and stamped through with great satisfaction. His gum was sore but the horrible white pain had gone. Hurrah for modern science.

Chapter Eighteen

THE SILENCE THROUGHOUT DINNER was so heavy, Lewis felt as if it had landed on the back of his own neck and was bowing his head. He had spent most of the time watching the lamp in the middle of the table. Janet hadn't cleaned it properly and it was smoking badly. A boy at his school had told him that one of their lamps had exploded, and hot oil and bits of glass flew straight into the face of their maid. "She was blinded from then on," said the boy. Lewis had been so frightened by this story that he sat as far away as possible from the lamps at home, irritating his mother, who could not reassure him. There was a second larger lamp on the sideboard behind him, but he thought he was far enough away to be safe.

As it was a Thursday, they had had a boiled leg of pork, carrots, and parsnips, also boiled, and a pease pudding which always accompanied the pork. His mother made up the menus and they were exactly the same from week to week, unless they had company, which happened rarely. Lewis loathed pease pudding but had forced himself to eat it, knowing he would draw his grandfather's wrath if he didn't clear his plate. Nathaniel was in a bad skin, worse than usual, and he had not spoken to anybody the entire meal. Mamma and Papa still weren't on speaking terms. Augusta sent all necessary requests or instructions by way of Lewis:

"Ask your father to pass the parsnips," or "Tell your father there is no more meat."

Even Uncle Jarius, who was usually talkative, had been quiet, and Uncle Frank might have been struck dumb for all he said.

Suddenly Lewis quailed, feeling his grandfather turn toward him.

"Stop fidgeting, boy. You'd think you had worms the way you've been wriggling."

Nathaniel had a long wiry grey beard that thrust out from the sides of his chin and virtually obscured his mouth. This meant that, when he spoke, the hair below his lips moved up and down in a way that made Lewis want to giggle.

Augusta intervened quickly.

"It's his new suit, Father. The wool is scratchy."

She reached over and tugged the jacket collar away from Lewis's neck.

His grandfather looked as if he were about to continue with his complaint, but Janet came into the room with her tray. She put it down on the sideboard, aware that everyone was watching her.

"What's the sweet?" asked Nathaniel.

"Baroness pudding, sir."

"I hope it tastes better than it did last week. It was a soggy mess as I recall."

Janet bobbed. "I'm sorry, Mr. Eakin. I boiled it much longer this time."

The sweet was a suet and raisin pudding that had to cook for at least four hours.

Clumsy because of the criticism, Janet clinked the dishes noisily as she cleared the table. Nobody spoke and Jarius was the only one who assisted her by handing over his plate.

"I'll serve, Janet. You can bring it to me," said Augusta.

She did so and Lewis tried to catch her eye to give her a quick grin of sympathy, but she was too intent on placing the pudding dish as delicately as she could in front of his mother.

"Shall I pour the tea, ma'am?"

"No, I'll see to it."

Janet curtsied again and returned to the sideboard, where she piled the used china on the tray. She left as fast as she could, but she had barely closed the door when Nathaniel spoke.

"That girl is not improving, Augusta. Can you talk to her?"

"I do all the time, Father. I cannot make silk out of a cow's ear ... I mean, out of a sow's ear."

"Fool," muttered Nathaniel.

Hearing him, Augusta flushed as red as her own maid had. Lewis tried to pretend he'd gone deaf and stared at the pale roll of pudding that his mother was handing him. His father had managed to withdraw his presence so completely from the table, he might as well have not been there.

Nathaniel sprinkled two large spoonfuls of sugar over his own portion and began to eat, smacking his lips. In front of him was a jug of beer that was almost empty. It was the second one he'd consumed tonight. Lewis knew that his grandfather's mood was greatly affected by the number of jugs of beer that got emptied. Usually, it was only one, but two downed, and downed quickly, spelled trouble. He looked over at his uncle Frank. He wasn't drinking anything at all, although he usually shared a carafe of wine with Jarius. Augusta only drank liquor at special occasions or if she was ill, and her husband did likewise. Lewis wished she would pour the tea. He was allowed a cup now as long as it was heavily supplemented with milk, and he enjoyed the feeling of being grown-up that it gave him. However, Augusta didn't move; instead she nibbled at her pudding. Lewis had only recently been accorded the privilege of eating with the grown-ups at the evening meal. So far he heartily wished he was in the kitchen with Cullie, even though that afternoon she had frightened him by recounting the tale of the policeman who had died. She'd heard all this from the baker's boy.

"For love. Imagine that. Shot his brains out with his very own gun. They were all over the place. That and the blood.

It was so thick you'd think the room had been painted red."

This account had disturbed Lewis almost as much as the story of the exploding lamp. He wondered if the mood in the house had anything to do with it. His father and uncle had to go and see the body. They hadn't said anything about all the blood but they must have been horrified.

He cut into the pudding. In spite of what Janet had said, it was undercooked in the centre and the suet was unpleasantly sticky. He picked out a raisin and chewed that.

Nathaniel finished eating and immediately Augusta put down her spoon. Lewis saw her exchange a glance with his uncle Jarius, who nodded and wiped his mouth with his napkin in his fastidious way.

"Stepfather, perhaps while everyone is present we could continue our earlier discussion," Jarius said. "We do owe Dr. Ferrier an answer by tomorrow. As I understand it, delay will only make matters worse."

Nathaniel shook his head. "This is not a suitable subject at the dinner table. Especially not with the boy present." He took another helping of the pudding.

"I am confident that Lewis is old enough to hear," said Augusta. "If we don't broach it now, when will we? It is a matter that concerns all of us."

"You're wrong," said Nathaniel, his open mouth revealing partly masticated suet and raisins. "She is my wife and the decision is mine to make."

Jarius answered; his voice was calm, reasonable.

"No one would disagree but it is such an important matter, Sister and I thought it might be helpful to you if we discussed it more thoroughly. As a family. Isn't that so, Frank?"

"Yes," said Frank.

"And you agree too, don't you, Peter?"

"Yes, begging your pardon, Father."

"We all love and honour you, sir," continued Jarius. "However, we cannot pretend this new marriage has been

easy on our household. To speak honestly, both her presence and her illness have been a dreadful disruption and created havoc for all of us.” He paused. “Surely it is obvious that we cannot return to the situation as it has been. I’m sorry, I realise these are most unpleasant things to hear, as they are for me to say, but we must not put our heads in the sand like so many ostriches.”

The image struck Lewis as funny and he could feel another giggle threatening to break free. He concentrated on the pattern of green squares on the tablecloth, jumping across them like stepping-stones.

Nathaniel pushed aside his dish. “You’re a good talker, Jarius, and you always have been. But if you want to speak honestly as you say, let’s go the whole hog. The truth is that under all this mealy-mouthed gabbing what my children are really concerned about is their inheritance. They’re all shitting in their britches in case I get more tads.” His eyes were dark under the bushy eyebrows. “And why not? She’s going to be all right. It was her boy dying that unhinged her.”

Lewis shrank down into his chair, trying to make himself as small as possible. He couldn’t bear any mention of Charley, whom he’d loathed from the moment he’d arrived. Whenever they were left alone, he tormented the younger boy until he sobbed. When he had died so suddenly and painfully, Lewis thought it must be because of him. He’d finally confided in his mother, who had been unexpectedly gentle with him. “Bad feelings don’t kill us, my chuck. If they did, nobody in this household would be alive today.”

“I’m still a vigorous man,” continued Nathaniel, “and she’ll be fertile for a long time to come yet. I could spawn five sons before I die.”

“Father, please,” said Augusta, indicating her son.

“You’re the one said he was old enough. So let him hear.”

Peter Curran stopped eating and sat staring at his plate as if he were a rabbit and the fox’s snout was coming through

the table.

"And any son she might drop would be a whole lot better than the one I have." Nathaniel addressed this remark to Jarius, ignoring Frank, who was leaning on his elbows on the table, toying with his fork.

"We all know my stepbrother has sowed a lot of wild oats," said Jarius. "I'm not condoning that, but he has settled down now. Isn't that so, Frank?"

Nathaniel didn't wait to hear a reply.

"Bollocks. He's still up to his tricks and you know it. He's hell-bent on destroying everything I've built up."

Frank didn't look up, but began tapping the fork on the side of the dish as if he were about to crack an egg. Nathaniel wouldn't stop now.

"This woman can get me children who will have respect. I'll see to that. They won't end up scragged like he's going to. Jarius, I don't count you in this. You're not my own flesh and blood, more's the pity, but you will get a nice bequest, don't worry about that. And I know you love me like you should."

"What about Lewis?" Augusta burst out. "What about your first grandson? He deserves consideration."

"Does he? I say let him earn it. Let him earn it the way I had to."

Lewis had heard his grandfather's story many times. How, at the age of fifteen, he'd fled from a poor farm in the north of England, stowed away on a steamer to Canada, and by dint of hard work and a good mind, had established himself in a livery stable, now considered one of the best in Toronto. This history usually took a long time to relate, especially after two jugs of beer, and Lewis hoped Nathaniel wasn't going to launch into it tonight.

However, he could see his mother wasn't going to tolerate storytelling. Her mouth had gone very tight and she spoke as if her jaw were stiff.

"And what about me? I am your only daughter. Surely I matter?"

Nathaniel flapped his hand as if she were an irritating fly. "I've no time for a woman who's put a twitch on her husband's tool the way you have."

Curran didn't respond, except to stuff his hands underneath his thighs out of harm's way. Nathaniel jabbed his finger in the air.

"And I've told you time and again that you're turning your lad into a prize Miss Molly. But you, you won't listen. He's getting to be more and more soft as he grows."

This wasn't the first time his grandfather had used that term, but when Lewis asked his mother what it meant, she wouldn't tell him. Uncle Frank said it meant he would turn out like the fat gelding in the stable and Lewis added that to his other pile of worries.

Suddenly, Frank sat up straight. "Young Nephew, you probably don't know what the hell we're all talking about, do you? Concerning your new grandmother, I mean."

"No, Uncle," whispered Lewis.

"Do you remember how we had to drown Fluffy because she kept getting out and having kittens? She just wouldn't stop? Always caterwauling and carrying on."

"Frank!"

"Don't worry, Aggie. I'm only trying to educate the boy. You see, Lew, your uncle Jarius thinks Grandmother Peg should have this special operation. It's performed on women who've lost their slates. They take out their innards, their sex parts. They can't have children after that but it's said to work wonders. Dampens them right down."

"Frank, stop it. You can't talk to the boy like that."

"Why not? His future is at stake. You see, Lewis, the problem is we're not just talking about a poor woman who's gone barmy. It's worse than that. Your grandfather is in fact married to a whore who is ready to stand for any man that comes knocking."

Nathaniel cuffed his son across the side of his mouth. His knuckle caught the top of Frank's lip, cracking it.

"You piece of filth. Your mother is crying in heaven over you."

Frank touched his finger to his mouth and examined the daub of blood. "She has a lot more to cry over than just me swearing."

Nathaniel hit out again but this time Frank was ready and he caught him by the wrist. He pushed back and they locked as if they were in a wrestling contest.

"Jarius, stop them," Augusta cried.

Gibb jumped up and came around the table. He gripped Frank's shoulder.

"Let him go."

Eakin did, at the same time pushing back from his chair so he was out of harm's way.

"I believe your father is owed an apology."

"Is he? All I'm doing is telling the truth ... You say you'd like more sons but how could you ever be certain of her offspring?"

"Hold your tongue."

"Look at me, Father! I'm flesh of your flesh. You look into a mirror when you see me. There is no doubt who fathered me."

Nathaniel stared at him, then he said, "Don't you think I regret that every day? What I see when I look at you disgusts me."

Frank flinched and Lewis could see the movement of his Adam's apple in his throat. Jarius was still standing close to him and he stepped forward.

"Stepfather, I am afraid in the interest of truth I must take Frank's side in this matter. He did not want to tell you but she went to him as well as myself. On Friday." He looked over at Curran. "I regret to say she approached both of them."

"You're lying."

Jarius frowned. "How can you say that to me? We were trying to spare you."

"Is it true?" Nathaniel asked his son. His voice was quieter but to Lewis he sounded even more terrifying.

Frank reverted to studying his plate. "Yes, Father."

"Like she did with Jarius?"

"Yes, the same."

"And you, Peter?"

"Er, yes, sir." He glanced quickly at his wife.

"Why didn't you tell me?" asked Augusta.

Curran stared at a point over her right shoulder. "No point really."

"I don't believe you!" Nathaniel roared and slammed his fist on the table. Lewis was afraid he would hit Frank again. Jarius bent over him.

"It is true, Stepfather. I saw them bringing her back. I did not want to tell you. You had enough to contend with. And you can see how upset you are."

All eyes were on Nathaniel. Finally he spoke.

"The woman is a whore, that is clear. I must apologise to you, Frank." He held out his hand, palm down, to his son.

Frank took it in his and kissed the fingers.

Lewis saw that he left behind a smudge of blood.

Chapter Nineteen

SAM LEE AND HIS SON LIVED IN A ROOM to the rear of the laundry. No Westerner had ever entered this place, and, if they had, it would have fulfilled all their most riotous fantasies about Chinamen. Earlier the two had lit incense sticks and the smell was dense and pungent in the air. The light was a soft bluish red. Lee had draped scarves of violet-coloured silk over the two lamps, which were turned down low. There was little furniture and all of it Lee had made himself. He was a talented wood-carver, but it would have been impossible for him to find work other than in the expected laundry. However, he had built a massive hinged panel that covered one side of the room, and slowly, over the lonely years, he'd covered it with carvings of flowers, birds, and bats. The entire work was painted with gilt. In front of this panel was a red lacquered table on which stood the kitchen altar, three porcelain cups, and rice-filled bowls with their chopsticks. A brightly coloured picture of Choi Sun, the god of wealth, was propped beside these items, and tucked slightly to the back was a more subdued painting of Jesus ascending to heaven.

Against the opposite wall was a single wooden couch covered with a thin, padded mattress and a blue quilt. The evidence of Western life was an ugly iron range that served as cooker and heater. Foon had prepared boiled rice and greens for their dinner and they were having it, seated cross-legged on the floor. He finished eating, served his father the remaining rice, and sat quietly, waiting.

Sam gave a soft belch in a sign of appreciation of the meal his son had prepared.

"Shall I get your pipe, *baba*?"

The older man nodded and Foon got up, crossed to a cupboard beside the range, and took out a brown leather sack. He returned to his father, who had stretched out on the wooden couch.

“Baba, with your permission, I have a question I would like to present to you.”

Lee was lying with his head on the pillow roll and his eyes were closed. “What is your question, *laoerh*?” He addressed his son in the traditional Chinese manner, according to his birth order, number-two son. Sam’s oldest child had remained in Hong Kong to help support his mother and sister. Sam intended to send for them when the law changed, or smuggle them in if it didn’t.

Foon opened the sack and removed the *yangqiang*, the opium pipe. It was made of bamboo with a tortoise-shell overlay. The tips were ivory and the saddle, where the bowl sat, was pewter and copper latticework studded with semi-precious stones of red and green. It was the most expensive object they owned, passed down to Lee from his uncle on his mother’s side and already promised to the eldest son. Foon placed it carefully beside him and lifted the cloth that covered their eating table. Tucked underneath was a low stand of black lacquer inlaid with mother-of-pearl, which he pulled out. Resting in shallow holes were four small bowls, each a different shape and material. He slid open the drawer and took out a long steel bodkin and a tiny polished wooden box. He placed them beside the pipe.

“Do you have a preference tonight, *baba*?”

Sam studied the dampers for a moment, then lazily indicated an onion-shaped one made of jade with a carved dragon design around the edge.

Foon picked it up and snapped the stem securely onto the pipe. Next he unscrewed the top of the little box and dipped the end of the bodkin into the opium paste it contained. He had turned up the wick of the lamp and he held the blob of dark, treacly paste in the flame. As soon as it caught fire, he

blew it out and rolled it in the pipe bowl, twirling the bodkin between his fingers and thumb. He repeated this procedure twice more, then handed the pipe to his father. Sam took in a deep breath, exhaled completely, then drew in the aromatic opium smoke, holding it in his lungs as long as possible. He let go of the smoke through his nostrils. Foon watched him for a moment, until he could see the pipe was to his satisfaction.

"At the inquest this morning, you instructed me to tell them that the young woman who claimed to be Mr. Wicken's fiancée was the same one that you had seen with the constable."

Sam was holding the bowl of the pipe over the lamp to heat it. He nodded an acknowledgment.

"Forgive me, *baba*, but obviously this was not the case. I too saw the woman who was walking with the constable and they were not at all alike. This first one was tall as any man. Would it not have been better to tell the truth?"

His father repeated his ritual of drawing in the smoke, then he said, "Why should I give them something they do not want? If I had said no, it is not she, that is not the one I saw, they would have continued to question me, implying I am a stupid foreigner who does not know what he is talking about. It was much simpler to agree."

"Do you think then that the young constable had two concubines?"

Sam smiled slyly. "No, I do not think so. This one we saw today is a liar."

"How do you know that, with respect, my father?"

"Chinese intuition."

Foon smiled also. "Of course. But why do you think she was prepared to risk damnation by lying with God's book in her hand?"

"I do not have an answer. Frankly, I do not wish to know. It is no concern of ours. Let them kill each other for all I care."

As far as they are concerned, we are ignorant savages with squirrel brains. Let them continue to believe so."

He passed over the pipe to Foon. "Here, my son, there is one draw left at least."

Foon hesitated. His missionary upbringing was at odds with his culture. His father was being generous and it was disrespectful to refuse, but he knew how the pastor had disapproved of opium smoking. He took the pipe while Sam watched him.

"All that nonsense about breaking a saucer. *My soul will be cracked like this vessel if I lie* . They treat us like foolish children."

Foon drew in a small amount of the smoke, retained it briefly, and returned the pipe to his father. Lee smoked in silence for about twenty minutes more, then he turned onto his side and stretched out his legs. Foon picked up the pipe, scraped out the bowl, and returned it to the stand. The *yangqiang* he placed back in the leather sack. Sam seemed to have drifted off into sleep and he looked peaceful. Sometimes the opium brought with it fearful visions that caused him to cry out in fear, but tonight the sensations were obviously pleasurable. Foon bent over him and gently lifted up the thick queue, untied the black silk cord that was braided into it, and loosened the hair completely. He drew his fingers like a comb from the base of Sam's skull, up to the crown, and out to the ends of the hair. His father sighed with sleepy pleasure.

"With respect to Chinese intuition, *baba* , would there be another reason you are so certain the young woman was lying?"

Sam grunted; his words were almost unintelligible with sleep. "I have seen her before. At her place of employment, a brothel on King Street."

Foon's soothing actions stopped.

Sam rolled onto his back and looked at his son. "Every man has needs of the flesh, *laoerh* . Except you, who have

the mind and will of a monk. I have discovered a place where a man can find comfort. They accept a Chinaman's money with quite a good grace." He chuckled. "The whores were intrigued by me. They said they had never seen a Chinese before and they insisted I display my member to the entire band of them. I think they were a little disappointed it was not so very different from the *fanguai*. The girl, Mary Ann, was one of the whores. Today I gave her thanks."

He rolled back to his side and waved at Foon to continue his stroking. "Your mother would understand. I am a man." Within a few minutes he had fallen asleep. Foon rebraided his hair and tied the ribbon.

He covered Sam with another padded quilt and went to extinguish the lamps. Then, quietly, he slipped in beside him. The opium had made him sleepy too, but he did not fall into dreams immediately. His thoughts were agitating to him. Lee was wrong about his son. Foon dreamed constantly of mating with a young woman and despaired of the possibility. The missionary teaching had gone deep into his soul and he was determined to remain chaste until he could find a wife and marry in the eyes of God. As this meant returning to China, he knew it would be a long time before they had enough money. He could feel a little bubble of resentment floating to the surface of his mind. His father had committed adultery and dishonoured his mother. That was sinful.

Chapter Twenty

AFTER NATHANIEL HAD GONE TO BED , Frank had come over to the stable, taken out a bottle of gin that he kept hidden in a box under his bed, and slowly and steadily drunk himself into unconsciousness. He had paid the price today.

“What time’s the green arse coming?” he called over to his brother-in-law, who was in the adjoining stall working on the mare they intended to sell.

“I told you, he said he’d be here by four.”

Frank took the jar of ginger, a tin of aniseed, and a bottle of turpentine from the shelf in the tack room. He carried them over to the bench where he’d already placed the measuring cup and an enamel bowl. Without thinking, he brushed his hand across his mouth and winced as he touched his lip. But he shrugged it off. He’d had worse.

He could remember the first whipping but not the reason for it and not the actual pain, although it had hurt him so badly he lost his breath. He must have been four years old, although that was hazy too. He may have been younger.

Jarius had brought him into the stable. It was winter time, he knew, because he had been outside in the yard making snowballs with Augusta. Had he thrown one at Jarius? Was that his misdemeanour? He still puzzled over it, as if knowing the transgression would make sense of the punishment. There had been many more after that, many of them severe, but it was the first one that had left the deepest scars, both physical and emotional. He had two long white marks on his right buttock where the skin had broken down.

Jarius, his stepbrother, was nineteen years his elder and Frank had always been afraid of him – his seriousness, his

dark hair and skin, unlike his fairness and Augusta's, who followed after their father in looks. He didn't understand why Jarius was so different but his mother finally answered his questions.

"Your father was married before to a widow lady. She already had a son of her own – Jarius. Not too long after the marriage, the poor woman died, but Jarius was raised like his own by your father. He was thirteen years of age when I married Mr. Eakin. A sombre boy even then."

Frank remembered she had sighed when she said that.

The second Mrs. Eakin always spoke in a soft, anxious voice, as if she were perpetually afraid of being overheard. Her name was Harmony and she said many times how she loved to think that she lived up to her name. Much later, with some bitterness, Frank realised what this really meant: she strove to say nothing that would offend and avoided conflict at all costs. She never interceded when Jarius took him over to the stable and even when she was forced to put ointment on his bleeding buttocks, she only whispered to him to try to be a good boy in future and not cause trouble.

Nathaniel also beat him, but not as frequently and never in such a sustained way. He said Jarius was his lieutenant and ignored any protests. Not that Frank tried for very long. He soon learned that to cry to his father was to make matters worse with Jarius when they were alone. He also learned to read his stepbrother's mood the way a dog will immediately assess a potential threat. Woe betide Frank if Jarius was in a temper about something else. He would always find some excuse to vent that anger on the boy. The hardest thing was that Frank never knew how to react. Sometimes if he screamed, Jarius would stop sooner. At other times, the crying only seemed to incense him more. Similarly, if Frank bit his lip and choked back his pain, Jarius sometimes gave up in disgust; at others times, he went on until Frank begged for mercy.

He measured out a dram of ginger and sifted out two drams of the aniseed into the bowl. He added the turpentine to the mixture and stirred it with his fingers until it formed a ball.

When he was twelve years of age, the punishments stopped. One afternoon, Jarius came home earlier than usual. It was a stiflingly hot summer day and Frank was in the stable. He was so uncomfortable with the heat he had stripped off his clothes and was standing naked, pouring a bucket of water over himself. He suddenly became aware that Jarius had come in and was watching him.

"My little brother is growing up, I see," he said, but his voice was so full of repulsion that Frank there and then began to think of himself as ugly; he knew it had to do with the hair that had grown in his crotch and the changes in his private parts.

Frank hadn't been paying much attention to what he was doing but suddenly the odour of the turpentine made him retch, his stomach was already so queasy from last night's binge. Then he realised he'd forgotten the other part of the recipe. Irritated, he went back to the shelf.

"Where is the frigging stuff?" he said out loud.

"What frigging stuff?" Peter Curran was in one of the stalls, working on the horse.

"The antimony. It's supposed to be here on the shelf."

"Don't blame me, I wouldn't touch it."

"Damnation."

They were interrupted by his nephew's voice.

"Uncle Frank? Shall I feed Brownie?"

Lewis was standing in the doorway. He could have been Frank's own child in appearance, with the same light brown hair and round face, but this similarity didn't endear him to his uncle. He was too quiet, inclined to be sly, and although he would never have admitted it, Frank saw himself mirrored in that cautious, wary expression with which Lewis regarded the world.

"Of course feed him. He was purged this morning. Have you been messing with the medicines?"

"No, Uncle Frank."

"This will have to do then. Put it in the mash." He held out the ball of aniseed, dropping the sticky mass into the boy's palm. "Stir it in well."

He followed the youngster to the stall and watched while he ladled mash from a pail into the horse's pan. Brownie stepped forward and Lewis leaped away, almost knocking over the pail.

Frank yelled at him and gave him a sharp rap on the side of the head.

"What's the matter with you?"

"I'm sorry, Uncle. I thought he was going to bite me."

"What a yellow-bellied little runt you are. He wanted his mash, not you. Get out of here. Go see if your father's finished."

Lewis scuttled away. Frank waited until he was sure the roan had swallowed the medicine, then followed him. Curran was in the process of blacking the mare's hooves. Earlier he had filed away the ridges in her front hooves to hide the fact she had foundered, and the blacking was to cover the signs.

"Done? Let's bring her out then. Our friend should be here soon."

Curran took the mare's halter and led her out of the stall.

Frank beckoned to Lewis. "Now, Mister Titty Suck, I want you to show the horse when the customer comes. Do you think you can do that without a big cock-up?"

"Yes, Uncle."

"This man is a stupid sod, fancies himself a bit of a buck but he's a green arse. Just the kind we like. He says he wants a lively carriage horse for his new bride. 'Course he doesn't want to pay a top price but never mind. We have the perfect mare for him. Good thing it's raining, you'll have to walk her in here. Doesn't matter if you're nervous, that'll look good, like she's spirited."

“Oh, I’m not scared of Duchess. She’s quiet.”

“Any more quiet and she’d be dead,” put in Curran. “I’m surprised you haven’t sent her to Lamb’s factory. She’ll make better glue than she will a ‘lively carriage horse.’”

Frank laughed. “Well, we have the remedy for that, don’t we? Hold on to her, Lewis, don’t let her run off.”

The boy stood holding the lead rein. The mare showed signs of a hard life and was slightly swaybacked. Her head drooped almost to the ground.

Frank came back with a piece of clean linen and the tin of powdered ginger. He took off the lid, twisted the cloth into a tight spindle, and dipped it into the ginger. Then, clicking his tongue softly, he approached the mare, lifted her tail, and quickly pushed the twist of cloth into her anus. She jumped, but almost immediately the ginger began to sting. She pawed at the ground.

“Walk her, Lew.”

The boy tugged on the halter and she needed no urging, stepping forward in a prance, her tail held high as she tried to get away from the irritation in her backside.

Frank whistled in delight. “She’s moving like a filly. We’ll give her another little boost just before he gets here. He’ll be totally satisfied. And he’ll think he’s bilking me into the bargain. ‘Course in two days she’ll be near death again but that won’t be my fault, will it?”

“What if he brings her back, Uncle?”

“He won’t. Our agreement will be final sale. Besides, he’s going away on his wedding trip. When he gets back, he can blame his own groom for overriding the horse. He’s not going to admit I duped him. All right, let her walk it off a bit, then put her back in the stall.”

He went over to the lantern that was hanging on a hook by the door and turned down the wick. “We can see quite well enough, thank you.”

Curran waited until Lewis had stabled the mare again, then he turned to Frank.

"By the way, Jarius said that Pa has made up his mind."

Eakin stared at him. "Why didn't you say so?"

"You was busy."

"Well, what's he going to do?"

Curran grinned. "I guess you persuaded him. She'll get the operation."

Chapter Twenty-One

AS SOON AS HE OPENED THE FRONT DOOR , Murdoch could hear Arthur coughing and immediately, almost subconsciously, he assessed the sound. No worse, maybe slightly better than usual. He was hanging up his coat and hat when the kitchen door opened and Enid Jones came out.

“Mr. Murdoch, I was hoping you wouldn’t be too late. Your supper is almost ready.”

He couldn’t resist imitating her lilt.

“Is it now?”

She smiled. “Is it mocking me you are?”

“Not at all. I could listen to you all day long.”

“I’d say that was a dreadful waste of time then.” But her tone belied the words.

However, they were both suddenly awkward, standing close in the narrow hall.

“Mrs. Kitchen has gone to a prayer vigil at the church,” Enid said. “I promised I would look after you in her place.”

“That’s kind of you, Mrs. Jones, but really I am quite capable of taking a plate out of the oven. I have done it many times before.”

“Whether you are capable or not isn’t the point, is it now? We both thought you could do with some tending to on a raw night like this. Especially with you having had your tooth pulled.”

She scrutinised him. “Your face is still swollen. Is it hurting?”

“Very much,” he said solemnly.

She stepped back. “Go get you a warm by the fire, then. I will bring in your tea.”

He went into the little front parlour. The fire was crackling and there was an extra lamp on the table. The heat and light seemed dazzling after the dismal weather outside.

"Hello, Alwyn."

Enid's son was sitting at the table with some sort of games board in front of him. As Murdoch entered, the boy glanced up but he didn't look too pleased to see him.

"Good evening to you, sir."

Murdoch looked over his shoulder. "What's that you've got?"

"It's a game my mamma gave me."

"Looks interesting. *The Prince's Quest*. What do you have to do?"

Alwyn became a little more animated. "The princess is asleep and she's in danger. There are four princes who want to save her. The first one to get to the bower wins her." His face was earnest. "The path is full of dangers."

"Ah, yes, I've known it to be."

There was a silence while the boy considered his options. Finally, he said, "Will you play then?"

"I would like to." He pulled out the chair next to the boy.

"We must first choose our pieces," said Alwyn.

He showed him cutout shapes of princes on little wooden stands. They wore flat hats, short embroidered jerkins, and dark stockings. Each had a sleeveless cloak, also short, which were of different colours.

"I'll take the purple one."

Alwyn looked disappointed. "That was the one I wanted."

Murdoch hesitated, trying to decide whether it would be better for character development for the boy to take his lumps or whether he could curry a bit of favour. He elected to placate.

"Green for me then. He's a handsome fellow."

"No, it's all right. My da said it wasn't manly to complain if things didn't go your way."

"Did he now? He was right, I'd say. Purple it is."

Alwyn studied the princes. "I'll take blue, no – this one, the red." He set the two chosen figures on the board, each one facing a different path. "Throw the die and move according to the number."

"Where's the princess?"

The boy pointed to a woman with extraordinarily long hair who was reclining languidly on a couch. Her eyes were closed so he assumed she was sleeping. Or waiting and full of anticipation.

Vigorously, he shook the die in his cupped hands and tossed it down with a flourish. One.

"Hm, the story of my life."

Alwyn threw a five and gleefully counted off the spaces along the path toward the prize.

"I'm beating you already."

Murdoch's next throw landed him on a square marked Shoes of Swiftness, and he was able to shoot ahead, thereby avoiding a stint of work in the dwarf's cave. Alwyn threw a four and landed in the *Garden of Sleep*.

"Oh, dear, miss three turns," said Murdoch.

"No, that's not fair," the boy wailed.

"It's the luck of the game, titch. Remember what your father said."

He was about to throw again when Enid entered. She was carrying a big tray.

He got up quickly to help her. Alwyn said something to her in Welsh, gesturing angrily at Murdoch. She answered in a soothing voice, shaking her head.

"I didn't," said Murdoch.

"Didn't what?" she said, startled.

"Cheat."

"You know Welsh?"

"No, but I know small boys. He landed fair and square in the *Garden of Sleep*. He has to miss three throws."

"Good gracious, that is hard."

"Rules are rules."

He wanted to add, *That is what your husband taught him* , but was reluctant to introduce any memory of her former love.

She turned to her son.

"Mr. Murdoch is going to have his supper. You can finish your game afterwards."

Alwyn answered in Welsh and, picking up the die, he went back to the board. He was going to play both princes. Then he was sure to win the princess. Murdoch thought it was churlish to protest. He moved over to the place set for him.

Enid lifted the lid off the tureen.

"I made a rabbit soup," she said. "It's a popular dish at home."

The food smelled so fragrant, Murdoch's mouth watered and he was afraid he'd actually be drooling if he didn't eat soon. She ladled some soup into a bowl, handed it to him, and waited for him to take his first taste. He did so, nearly scalding himself.

"Utterly delicious," he managed to mutter.

"It's hot, be careful now."

He tore off a piece of bread from the hunk on his plate and stuffed that into his mouth to ease the pain. She watched him with gratification as he made more appreciative noises.

"I thought you'd need something soft."

Alwyn looked up. "I've got a loose tooth." He opened his mouth and waggled one of his front teeth.

"Good for you," murmured Murdoch, trying to make sure the soup wasn't getting into the gaping crater he could feel in his gum.

"I'll bring in the potatoes. I mashed them up with the rest of the rabbit," said Enid.

She went back to the kitchen, leaving Murdoch to blow air into his burning mouth.

Alwyn returned to his game, talking quietly to himself as he moved his pieces. Murdoch saw him land in the Haunted Glen. He was supposed to throw a three to get out but he

ignored that and moved on. Murdoch was about to call out, "Hey, you're cheating," but thought better of it. The lad needed a firm hand, he decided. He studied him for a moment. He had his mother's dark eyes but he was sharper of feature and his hair had a curl to it. I wonder what it's like to see your own reflection in a child's face, thought Murdoch. Or the face of the woman you have loved? He stopped eating.

Enid came back into the room and he hastily dipped his spoon back into the soup.

"Is it all right then?"

"Wonderful."

She put the platter on the table.

"Thank you, Mrs. Jones. This is very kind of you."

"Not at all. I wanted to help Mrs. Kitchen."

On impulse, he caught hold of her hand, grasping it awkwardly in a semi-handshake. Then, as if his body were acting entirely on its own accord, he brought her fingers to his lips, kissing them lightly. Her skin smelled faintly of onions. She didn't pull away but he didn't know what to do next. He wanted desperately to be eloquent but found himself tongue-tied. He looked up at her. This time she did move.

"I must go fetch the potatoes."

"You brought them in already."

"So I did." She became even more flustered and reached for the soup tureen. "I'll take this out of your way and let you finish your meal in peace."

"This is peace. I'd be honoured if you would keep me company."

She hesitated briefly, then sat down at the opposite end of the table.

"Very well."

He bought some time by spooning up more soup, which had cooled somewhat.

"Utterly delicious."

She nodded. Alwyn gave him a reprieve by getting up and going over to his mother.

"I won, Mama. I rescued the princess."

Fondly, she put her arms around him and kissed his forehead. "Well done, little one."

Murdoch was about to say that it was easy to win if you were moving both pieces but he bit his tongue. Feeling rivalrous, was he?

"If you go into the kitchen you will find a tray of lemon dumplings," she said to the boy. "You can have one for yourself. But eat it there, look you."

Alwyn took off.

"Lemon dumplings? This is a meal fit for a king."

There was another uncomfortable silence while he tackled the platter of rabbit meat and potatoes.

"Mr. Murdoch, there is something I have been wanting to ask you."

"Yes?" He was hopeful.

"In church last week, the minister was preaching about the afterlife. He pointed out that if my son were to die, God defend us, the Roman Catholic Church teaches that he would not go to heaven as he is not of the Catholic faith. He would be deprived of the sight of God for all eternity through no fault of his own. Can you explain to me how a person who believes in the Divine love can accept such a cruel doctrine?"

Murdoch almost groaned out loud. A theological discussion was not his notion of love talk. But she was regarding him earnestly, wanting an answer.

"As far as I am concerned, doctrine is man-made. We hope that it reflects God's will on earth but we can never know that for sure."

She seemed dissatisfied with his answer. "Yes, but ..."

Fortunately, he was rescued by Mrs. Kitchen coming into the parlour. Her nose and cheeks were reddened from the chill air outside.

“Mr. Murdoch, I am so glad Mrs. Jones has been taking good care of you. I won’t even apologise for my absence, since I can see what a splendid meal she has prepared.”

Murdoch stood up to greet her. “Splendid and plentiful.”

“Are you ready for your tea?”

“I am indeed.”

“The kettle is at the boil,” said Enid.

“Good, let me just see how Arthur is doing and I’ll make us all a pot. You will join us, won’t you, Mrs. Jones?”

“Thank you, but perhaps another night. I have to start getting Alwyn ready for bed.”

She headed for the door.

“Perhaps I can answer your question at a later time,” said Murdoch.

She nodded. “It is a discussion I am looking forward to.”

Mrs. Kitchen waited until she left. “She worked all day on that soup, Mr. Murdoch. I would be careful if I were you.”

“What do you mean, Mrs. K.? It tasted quite all right to me.”

She tapped his hand. “Don’t pretend. You know perfectly well what I am talking about. She fancies you.”

Murdoch clasped both her hands in his. “Oh, dear Mrs. K., is that so terribly bad?”

“It’s not so much it’s bad, as that it’s out of the question. Or have you forgotten she’s a Baptist?”

He sighed and let her go. “No. You both seem intent on reminding me. She wanted to know how I explained limbo.”

“Did she indeed? That means she’s serious. She’s trying to see how big the chasm is. But never you mind, some people have made successful mixed marriages. She would have to convert, of course.”

He grinned. “Mrs. K., here we are talking about the lady as if she and I were courting. I’m not even at the starting line.”

She smiled, knowingly. “I would say you’re approaching it fast.”

Chapter Twenty-Two

MURDOCH PUT HIS REPORT BACK in the file folder and returned it to the cabinet. Two local ministers from Jarvis Street Baptist Church had issued a complaint. An English travelling troupe of dancers had distributed bills on the street. The photographs of the young women in the troupe were completely indecent, according to the ministers. They requested the police charge them. Murdoch thought the women, although showing a length of lower leg, were suitably clothed for dancers, assuming they had to pirouette and leap about. The ministers were indignant at his defence, and it became apparent that their complaint was not only concerning the clothing, but the very existence of the troupe. He had taken their deputation, accepted the petition with a long list of signatures, and promised to investigate further.

He found it hard to muster much enthusiasm for the case. He'd been sitting for at least a half an hour with Elizabeth's photograph in front of him. He knew it was irrational of him but he was feeling guilty at the intensity of his feelings for Mrs. Jones. It was all very well for Father Fair to say she was dead and in God's love and that she would be happy for him. In life, Liza had been prone to possessiveness, something he'd rather liked. It had made him feel wanted. He picked up the framed picture. *Liza, my dearest, you know that you had my heart and, if you had lived, no one else would ever have warranted a glance from me. But you left me and I cannot help myself. This is a woman you would have liked, perhaps befriended. I know she is not of our faith but oh, Liza, I do have to admit, I would dearly like to have*

her . The blurry image of his dead fiancée showed no expression except, he was sure, some reproach.

He and Liza were of the same faith, of course, but he couldn't remember that they had discussed it much. Religion was part of the fabric of their lives, unquestioned for the most part, the rituals so familiar. They went to mass regularly and therefore to confession. They'd laughed about that together, well aware that they were committing venial sins all the time with their mutual impure thoughts. Liza insisted her penances were more severe than his but he didn't know if that was because she owned up to worse things or because she was a woman.

He touched the photograph. It was not a very good picture. Her large-brimmed hat was shading her face too much and she'd moved just as he clicked the shutter. He returned the photograph to the drawer, feeling even more guilty that he was putting her away in that fashion.

Impatiently, he brushed off a couple of lethargic flies that were crawling over the surface of his blotter. Because of the adjoining stables, the fly population never completely disappeared. The flies just got slower, storing up energy for the spring onslaught.

He leaned back in his chair. Usually he took his surroundings for granted but today he scrutinised them with critical eyes, and his spirits sank even lower as he took in the pervading shabbiness. His desk was old, wobbly, and in need of revarnishing. He hadn't added to its appearance by constantly scratching the surface with his pen-nib when he was trying to get his thoughts straightened out. There was room for only one other chair, a decidedly shabby armchair from heaven-knows-what previous life. Part of the seat was torn and some of the horse hair was coming out. He had requested a replacement, but so far nothing had happened. According to Inspector Brackenreid, there was no money to spend, although Murdoch noticed his office was well furnished. Only last month, a splendid crimson velvet rug

had arrived from the T. Eaton Company. So what if the roof still leaked over the stables and the sashes on the windows were so shrunken the snow drifted through in the winter? If Brackenreid met with members of the public they served, which was rare, he did so in impressive surroundings. The sweet fruits of power.

That taste was forever out of his reach, thought Murdoch, a little dismayed at his own bitterness. As a Roman Catholic, his chances of promotion were virtually nonexistent. He was considered lucky to have even been admitted into the recently formed detective department. The men who ran the police force were Protestant. Less acknowledged, but a significant factor, was that they were also Free Masons and belonged to one of the numerous orders that dominated the commercial and social life of the city.

He swivelled around to face the wall behind him where there were two framed portraits hanging. One was of the chief constable, Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Grasett, the other of Her Majesty, Queen Victoria. When Murdoch had first heard a rumour that the queen insisted her dead husband's clothes, shaving water, and razor be put out every morning, he'd thought such a show of grief excessive. Since Liza had died, however, he understood completely the need to cling to any vestige of that previous life, to hold on to the illusion that death was not final.

He picked up his pen and started to run the nib along a groove in the top of the desk. Some previous owner had carved the initials I.F. and, with Murdoch's help, the letters were now dark blue scars.

There was a tap outside his cubicle. Through the reed curtain he could see the large frame of Constable Crabtree.

"The inspector would like to see you at once, Mr. Murdoch. In his office."

"What for now?"

Crabtree poked his head through the reed strips. "A young lady came in a short while back asking for Wicken. Said she

was his friend and she hadn't seen him lately. Wondered if he was ill."

Murdoch stared at Crabtree in dismay. "That's not good, is it!"

"Sergeant Seymour directed her right upstairs to see Inspector Brackenreid, but he's sent for you."

Murdoch stood up, followed the constable out to the front hall, and hurried up the stairs to the second floor where the inspector had his office. He was admitted at once.

A young woman was standing by the window, looking down to the street below. She was tall, her height accentuated by the long navy-blue waterproof she was wearing. Her red felt hat with its big satin bow and curled white quill was jaunty and fashionable.

Brackenreid was behind his desk. With his heavy moustache and smart uniform with the velvet frogs down the front, he was a distinguished-looking man, as long as you didn't come close enough to see the red veins in his cheeks or the stains down his jacket. Brackenreid was a toper, something, he deluded himself, nobody knew. He gave Murdoch an unusually warm greeting as he entered.

"Ah, Murdoch, glad you were available. This is Miss Isobel Brewster. She is enquiring about Constable Wicken. Miss Brewster, I'd like to present Detective Murdoch. He has, er, been, um, been involved in the case from the beginning."

The woman didn't stir; it was not clear if she had even heard what he'd said.

"I had to tell Miss Brewster what has happened," he continued. "That Constable Wicken had, er, passed away. She didn't know, so she is understandably distressed at the moment. She and Wicken were friends. She was wondering why she hadn't seen him recently and came here to find out."

"I see," said Murdoch.

The woman swung around and glared at him. "What does that mean, *I see*?"

Her fierceness was startling.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am, I meant nothing by it."

He stopped, not sure how much Brackenreid had told her. The inspector gave a slight shake of his head. He pulled a watch out of his pocket. "I do apologise, Miss Brewster, but I have an appointment I must keep. Can't be put off. Why don't you just stay here a little while and talk to Detective Murdoch. I'll have some tea sent up, and when you're ready, we'll have somebody accompany you home. Will that be all right?"

She nodded and the inspector left, fast as all cowards are to leave the place of pain.

"Won't you please come and sit down," said Murdoch.

"I prefer to stand." She turned from the window but didn't come closer. She looked to be no more than twenty or so, not a beauty by any means. Her features were sharp, the nose too long, the mouth thin. She was regarding him with frightened eyes.

"He says that Oliver Wicken has died. But how? What happened? He was quite well when I saw him last."

"When was that, ma'am?"

"Monday evening."

"His body was discovered early on Tuesday morning. I'm afraid he had been shot."

She gave a quick intake of breath. "What are you saying? Shot how?"

"It appears it was by his own hand. There was an inquest and the jury returned a verdict of suicide."

She stared at him in disbelief for a moment, then laughed derisively, as if he had said something incredibly stupid. "That is out of the question. When I saw him he was in perfectly good spirits. You are mistaken." With perceptible agitation now, she stepped closer. "Perhaps you are speaking of someone else. I am enquiring about Constable Oliver Wicken. He is blond-haired. He has a moustache and side-whiskers." She gestured at her own cheek.

"I'm sorry, Miss Brewster, but there is no mistake. I myself found his body. There is no doubt it was Oliver Wicken. I knew him."

She sat down abruptly on the edge of the chair, as if she could no longer trust herself to remain standing. Her manner became belligerent as shock hid itself in anger. "On what did the jury base their verdict of suicide?"

"Partly on the evidence of the post mortem examination. He had been shot in the right temple and the coroner felt this was consistent with a self-inflicted wound." He almost demonstrated but stopped just in time.

"And that is all the so-called evidence?"

"No. There was a note found on his person that seemed to indicate he was in an extremely despondent frame of mind."

"What did it say?"

"The exact words were, 'Life is unbearable without your love. Forgive me.'"

He paused while she absorbed this.

"Can I see the letter?"

"It is considered part of his effects and they have been returned to his mother."

"There was nothing else? No person addressed? No signature?"

"No, that was all."

She jumped to her feet again and strode back to the window. She was virtually shouting. "I don't believe it, do you hear? Ollie had no reason to feel that way."

Sobs were threatening to break through but they were suppressed almost immediately. She came back to the chair and sat down, her back as stiff as if she were in a deportment class.

"I should tell you, Mr. Murdoch, that Oliver was my ... that is, what I mean to say is, we were betrothed. We have been for almost a year."

She caught the surprise in his face and misinterpreted it. "It was a secret engagement. Ollie was concerned about his

mother. He supports her solely and he was afraid she would not approve, that she would worry about him marrying." Suddenly, she leaned over and caught Murdoch by the sleeve. "About the letter you found ... Are you certain it was written by Oliver?"

"It was not handwritten; it was printed. He had used a piece of paper from his notebook."

Her voice dropped. "I was always on at him about how bad his hand was. He did print sometimes."

Murdoch's heart went out to her. She had come dressed in her best, worried but never suspecting the dreadful news she would receive. And that was not all of it. Suddenly, her eyes met his and he was taken off guard by the shrewdness of her next question.

"I have the feeling you are not telling me everything. Please believe me, it would help me to know all that happened. I am not going to have hysterics, I assure you. Was there something else that was said at the inquest?"

Murdoch wished he could soften the blow but he knew he couldn't. "Yes, there was. A young woman came forward who said she was Wicken's fiancée. She broke off the engagement that night, Monday, which seemed the likely cause for him to have become so despondent."

Isobel Brewster turned putty white. She could hardly form her words.

"That is impossible."

"The woman swore under oath. She said they had been engaged for the past two months."

"What was this woman's name?"

"Miss Mary Ann Trowbridge."

"I've never heard of her. I ..."

She groaned and her lips and chin began to shake. She held her fingers to her mouth as if she could barely risk hearing her own voice out loud. Whatever she was about to say, he didn't hear because, at that moment, her eyelids started to flutter and she leaned back abruptly, her eyes

rolling back in her head. He jumped up and caught her just as she was about to slide off the chair.

"Put your head down on your knees."

She did as she was told and remained like that for a few moments longer, then slowly sat up. Murdoch took her right hand in his, pushed down the cuff of her glove, and rubbed the back of her wrist vigorously. The same with the left. She hardly allowed him to minister to her before she pulled away her hands.

"I'm quite all right now."

"I thought you were going to faint."

"I despise women who faint." She licked her lips. "Can I have a glass of water, please?"

"Just a minute."

He went back around to the other side of the desk. Just as he'd hoped, there was a flask in the top drawer. He shook it to make sure it wasn't yet empty and brought it over to her.

"Sip some of this."

He unscrewed the top and handed her the flask. She took a big sip of the brandy, coughing as it burned her throat.

"Good thing I'm not temperance," she said with a small smile. Her colour was better now, and satisfied she wasn't going to faint completely, he returned to his own chair. She took another drink.

"I do apologise."

"There is no need."

"What you have said is a great shock to me. It is quite unbelievable."

"The young woman has a letter from her aunt testifying to the truth of her statement and we have a witness who swore under oath that he saw the constable with Miss Trowbridge the night he died."

"What witness?"

"His name is Samuel Lee. He runs a laundry on Parliament Street. He says that Constable Wicken checked his

establishment that night and he saw this young woman with him."

"When?"

"About a quarter past eleven."

"Impossible. I tell you that is utterly impossible. Oh, Mr. Murdoch, please believe me. It was me he saw. I was with Oliver then. I would often meet him on his beat. We needed to catch any time together that we could. I know it was against the rules but he didn't neglect his duty in any way; he was very responsible. On Monday night, I met him on the corner as he was coming up Parliament Street and I walked with him as far as Gerrard."

"And this was at that time?"

"Yes. It was always the same time."

"Were you with him when he went into the Chinese laundry?"

"Yes. He went inside for a few minutes while I waited on the sidewalk."

"The proprietor did identify Miss Trowbridge as the woman accompanying Wicken."

"He was mistaken."

She read Murdoch's doubt. "Please believe me. I swear I am telling the truth. I went as far as the empty house on the corner. We often met there. It gave us some privacy."

"Did you go inside?"

"No. Frankly, we would have but the doors were locked. We stood in the front doorway."

"For how long?"

"About a half an hour ..." She moaned. "We had an argument."

"What was it about?"

"I assure you, Mr. Murdoch, it was not so serious. Just a tiff, a lovers' tiff, the way any couple will argue."

He waited while she sorted out in her mind the implications of what she was saying. That this was the last exchange she had had with her sweetheart.

"We have been engaged for almost a year now," she continued. "I was eager to announce it and have the bans read but we could not agree. Oliver was still procrastinating. He was always afraid to upset his mother. She depends upon him entirely."

"Did you resolve the matter?"

"No. I ... er, I have a hot temper. I told him he must make up his mind or I would break off the engagement. I walked away."

She frowned. "Wait. That is not the truth, Mr. Murdoch, and it is the pure truth that we are after, is it not? I did not *walk* away, I ran. I was furious with him."

"Where was he when you left?"

"Still in the doorway."

"Miss Brewster, sometimes in a moment of imbalance we do foolish things. In your mind is it possible that Oliver was so distressed by your quarrel he took his own life?"

"He was not that kind of weakling, Mr. Murdoch." She almost spat out the words. "You see, I know what I'm talking about ... My own father hanged himself when I was a child. As a matter of fact, I was the one who found him. He was in the living room when I came home from school. He had lost his job and he never stopped moaning about it. He would sit and brood all day long, talking endlessly about how terribly he'd been treated. Suicides make sure they give you plenty of notice so you can feel sorry for them. Ollie might have been distressed when I left but he was no coward. He would never desert me or his mother and sister; he cared for us too much. I can only think there must have been a dreadful accident."

Murdoch spoke to her gently. "Miss Brewster, Wicken was inside that house when I found him."

"Where?"

"In the rear kitchen."

"But the house was locked. He tried the door."

"He had a key in his pocket."

Again he waited while she absorbed this information.

"Mr. Murdoch, I know what you're thinking; I can read it in your face. But Oliver was not deceiving me. We shared everything. He talked a lot about the station, the inspector, you - he liked you. Besides he had no time to be with somebody else. He has a crippled sister who requires a lot of care, and when he wasn't on duty, he was at home helping his mother. That's why I would meet him on his beat. I'd take him some supper." She plucked at the cuff on her glove. "I am certain this other woman is lying."

"Why would she do so, Miss Brewster? She came forward voluntarily."

"I don't know."

Her voice tailed off and he could see her trying desperately to sort through her memories. Was there any evidence of him being unfaithful? Small signs she might have ignored?

Isobel Brewster did not have the delicate prettiness of Mary Ann Trowbridge but there was a forthrightness to her, a promise of a passionate nature, that was attractive. He believed her when she said she was engaged to Oliver Wicken. However, that didn't mean the constable hadn't been playing fast and loose.

He realised she was regarding him anxiously.

"I'm sorry, Miss Brewster. It is possible that Mr. Lee was mistaken in his identification, but you can see that Wicken could have met with this other young lady after you left ..."

"No!"

There was no point in continuing.

"What are you going to do now?" she asked. "You can't leave it like this surely."

"The case is officially closed."

"But you didn't like the verdict, did you? I can see it. I can see it in your eyes."

She was almost sobbing again. "Please, Mr. Murdoch. Please don't leave it like this."

He hesitated, not wanting to make a promise he wouldn't be able to keep. "I must admit what you have told me changes the picture. There are some discrepancies that should be clarified. I'll see what I can do to clear them up."

Suddenly, she reached over, grasped his hand, and pressed it against her cold cheek.

"Thank you! I am quite aware that what is revealed may not be to my liking, but I would rather know the truth than not."

He hoped she wasn't deluding herself. He'd seen the truth burn like ice.

Chapter Twenty-Three

MURDOCH WALKED ISOBEL BREWSTER to her home, which was on Parliament Street, just below Queen Street. They did not speak at all and when they arrived, she dismissed him at the door. She said her mother and stepfather did not know of the engagement either, so there was nothing to be gained by telling them now. Murdoch could only guess at the anguish the young woman was going to go through alone. He promised to come back as soon as he had anything new to report and he left her.

Brackenreid had returned from his urgent appointment and Murdoch went to tell him what had happened. The inspector was surprisingly sympathetic to Isobel's plight, muttering several "poor lassies," but he was in no doubt that Wicken had deceived her.

"If you can get a bite on two ripe apples, why just have one?"

Murdoch murmured something noncommittal.

Brackenreid leaned back in his chair. "Do you think it's possible that one of the lassies found out what Wicken was up to and put the gun to his head? It wouldn't be too hard to write a note making it seem like a suicide. Miss Brewster could have returned, all weepy and wanting to make up for her harsh words. And lo, not only is he in the house he said they couldn't get into, he is the one weeping. It all tumbles out; you know how men like to confess these things. She's enraged, snatches his gun from his holster, and bang! She waits a few days, comes in with a good cover story."

"I suppose it's not out of the question, sir. Although it doesn't make a lot of sense that she would implicate herself unnecessarily. The case was closed. Besides, I would find

that hard to believe about Miss Brewster." He remembered Isobel Brewster's grief-ravaged face and he felt bad they were even talking like this. Brackenreid hardly seemed to have heard him.

"On the other hand, Miss Trowbridge's story could have been all smoke and gammon. Maybe she saw them together. Brewster leaves, she confronts Wicken. He says yes, I do have another tickler. She is enraged, seizes his gun, and so on."

Unexpectedly, Brackenreid stopped being a fool. "What you said applies just the same though, doesn't it? Why be implicated if you don't have to?"

"Yes, sir."

"However, women do the strangest things when they have their cap set on a fellow."

"Is that right, sir?"

The inspector looked at him sharply but Murdoch had kept his voice neutral.

"Regardless, there are inconsistencies. Go talk to people again. See Mrs. Wicken, the Chinaman. I did wonder about his reliability, by the way. The Chinese always lie. Don't understand why, but they do."

He stroked at his moustache. "I hate to put it this way, but murder would be preferable, wouldn't it?"

"You mean rather than suicide, sir?"

"Quite. I don't like to think of one of my constables being so unmanly. Anyway, see what you can do."

Murdoch decided to visit Mrs. Wicken first. Painful as it might be to probe this question, she had a right to know this new information about her son.

The rain had stopped and a weak sun was struggling through the cloud covering, making a patch of silver in the pervading grey sky. He was warm enough today and his abscessed tooth was now only a sore gum, but he couldn't shake the feeling of heaviness in his body. Everywhere he

turned, no matter what he found, somebody was going to suffer.

When he got to the Wicken house, he paused for a moment at the gate, rehearsing in his mind what he was going to say. The place looked almost abandoned. All the curtains were drawn and no crack of lamplight showed. The branches of the tree in the front were wrapped with black ribbon, and a wreath of crepe and intertwined willow branches was hung on the door. Murdoch pushed open the gate and walked up to the door. Before he had a chance to knock, it was opened by a woman he recognised as the solicitous neighbour who was with Mrs. Wicken at the inquest. She greeted him in a hushed, reverential voice.

"Good morning, sir. I'm Mrs. Morrow, one of Mrs. Wicken's neighbours. If you've come to call on her, you'll have to come later. She's not receiving until this afternoon. But I'll take your card if you wish."

Murdoch fished in his coat pocket and took out his card case. He handed her one of his cards.

"Please tell her I need to have a word."

Mrs. Morrow frowned. "She's had a dreadful shock. I don't know if she is up to talking about anything."

"I appreciate that, Mrs. Morrow, and I wouldn't trouble her if it wasn't important."

The woman shifted slightly so that she was more solidly in the doorway.

"We could all say that if we wanted to. Why, Mrs. Lynch's eldest was here just yesterday and ..."

Whatever Mrs. Lynch's eldest had done, Murdoch was never to know, because at that moment Mrs. Wicken herself appeared in the hall. When she saw Murdoch, she actually smiled.

"It's all right, Mrs. Morrow, I would be happy to see Mr. Murdoch."

The guardian stood back, allowing Murdoch barely enough room to squeeze by her into the hall.

"Mrs. Morrow, will you take Mr. Murdoch's hat and coat?" There was something autocratic in her manner that he thought was not conscious to her. She had been accustomed to having servants. The other woman didn't seem to mind, however, and she did as asked, then went back to her post at the door, peering through the glass sidebars.

"We've moved in here," said Mrs. Wicken, and she ushered him through the velvet portieres into the front room. Murdoch felt a twinge of uneasiness quickly followed by guilt at his own cowardice. He didn't want to see poor Dora. However, she was in her Bath chair close to the fire. There were two lamps lit, the wicks low so that the room was full of shadows.

"Please sit down, Mr. Murdoch. It is kind of you to call."

He didn't know where to start and he procrastinated by making polite conversation. She was as well as could be expected, said Mrs. Wicken, but Dora had been poorly.

"She misses her brother dreadfully. You might not think it to look at her but she is quite aware of who is here. She began to be restless last evening when Oliver would usually have come in to play with her, before he went on his shift. I cannot of course explain why he is not here."

The girl made a moaning sound and turned as much as she could in Murdoch's direction; the massive head rolled too far and her neck could not control it. Mrs. Wicken reached over quickly and righted her.

Murdoch could understand why young Oliver might be reluctant to tell his mother about a forthcoming marriage. It would be difficult indeed to extricate himself from the dependency of his mother and sister. He could see how distressed the child was. A man's voice, barely heard, had stirred her.

Mrs. Wicken sat back in her chair and picked up the frame on which she was making lace.

"After the inquest I was hoping that the young woman who purported to be Oliver's fiancée would have spoken to me. I would have found some comfort in our mutual grief. However, she left at once without a backward glance."

She had given Murdoch his lead. "Mrs. Wicken, the reason I came to talk to you today has to do with that. You said you were not aware that Oliver was betrothed."

"It was, I have to admit, a great shock to me. He was such an honest boy and he gave me no indication. I suppose he was afraid to upset me. There are very few new wives who would take on such a burden as Dora. She would have insisted they live elsewhere, I am sure."

Again he hesitated, but there was no way around it if he was going to get any information at all.

"Mrs. Wicken, I was visited this morning by a young woman named Isobel Brewster. She is also claiming to be Oliver's fiancée. She says they were secretly betrothed almost a year."

"Good Lord. Am I to hear of a whole choir of fiancées?"

"I must say, she is quite credible. She says she saw him last on Monday night about eleven o'clock. They had a quarrel that she describes as trifling, and she is convinced he was not the kind of man to take his own life."

Mrs. Wicken was staring at him in utter disbelief. She put down the lace. At that moment the invalid child moaned and she was distracted for the moment as she tended to her.

"I need to move her to the couch. Will you be so good as to help me, Mr. Murdoch?"

"Of course."

"If you will take her by the legs, I will hold her head and we can swing her over."

She wheeled the chair in closer and Murdoch followed. There was a wool rug tucked around the child's legs.

"Ready?"

He nodded and with a slight heave they moved her onto the couch. Her mother turned the large head sideways. The

girl had pale blue eyes that in a normal child would have been pretty, but the pressure of the fluid made them protrude horribly. She seemed to be watching Murdoch, although he could not be sure how much she saw. She made some more guttural sounds and her lips moved.

"She probably thinks you are her brother. She wants you to touch her," said Mrs. Wicken.

"Of course, what ... er ... how ...?"

"She likes to have her hair stroked."

There was no way Murdoch could, or would have, refused. He reached out to the sparse hair, white and downy as milkweed. Gently he stroked the enormous head. The girl smiled and quite quickly her eyes closed.

"Thank you, Mr. Murdoch. That was kind. She will sleep for a while now."

Mrs. Wicken stood up and went back to her chair by the fire. He too resumed his seat. For a few moments, he wondered if she had actually heard what he'd said or if she was going to respond at all. She picked up her lace making and without looking at him, she said:

"It is beginning to seem as if I did not know my son at all. Not one but two fiancées. It is quite extraordinary."

"Mrs. Wicken, we cannot rule out the possibility that one or even both of these young women are not telling the truth."

She frowned. "Why would they lie? They have nothing to gain. Even if he did go without my knowledge and bequeath everything to ... another person, with the verdict of suicide, there will be no redemption. The hope of money cannot be a motivation."

"I have spoken to Inspector Brackenreid about the whole matter and he has asked me to investigate further. To put it bluntly, to find proof."

"What can I do to help any further?"

"Isobel Brewster is the only one of the two women that I have spoken to as yet. She says that she would meet Oliver

on his day off in the afternoon. Otherwise she met him on his beat. His last day off was a week ago. Did he leave the house that day?"

He could see how much she still wanted to deny it but she nodded. "Yes, he told me he was going to the lending library. He was an ambitious boy, Mr. Murdoch. He thought that if he was well read, it would improve his chances for advancement in the police force."

Murdoch didn't tell her that possibilities for promotion were limited these days and depended almost entirely on attrition in the ranks above.

"I'll check if anybody saw him there. And I am going to talk to the other woman, Miss Trowbridge. Also, I was wondering if I might look in Oliver's room."

"Yes, of course, if you think it will help."

"I believe his effects were returned to you. May I see them? I particularly would like to borrow the letter."

"I burned it. His uniform belongs to the station. It was stained, so I doubt it would be reused. There was nothing else of a personal kind."

She indicated a second door. "His room adjoined this one. It is not locked. When you've done, would you mind leaving by way of the hall? I don't want Dora to wake just yet; she hasn't been sleeping well. As you see, she needs care at all hours. I don't know if I will be able to manage without Oliver's support. It is quite likely that I will have to place her in the home for incurables ... I cannot think how appalling that would be for her. You perhaps think she is hardly human but it is not the case. She is very attached to her family."

Murdoch could think of nothing to say. Mrs. Wicken turned back to her task.

He stood in the middle of the room, pivoting slowly, trying to get some sense of the young man who had so recently left it. Presumably for reasons of economy, the Wickens lived on the first floor of the house and rented out the second floor.

This meant that Oliver occupied what would normally have been the dining room. There were connecting doors to the front room and the kitchen at the rear, both screened with tasselled chenille portieres of a rich floral pattern. The wallpaper was embossed gilt in crimson and green designs and the ceiling paper was a buff and blue glimmer. The room wasn't large and so much decoration made it seem suffocatingly small. The furnishings also would have done better in a more grand space. There was a massive wardrobe and matching bureau, both of dark mahogany. A lace-covered dining table was shoved tight against the far wall. The single concession to the actual use of the room was a mantel bed, which was alongside the window. It was neatly closed up. Wicken was tidy or had been kept so by his mother, for there was little of the debris of daily living scattered about.

What am I looking for? A diary? Love letters? Any indication into what was truly happening in the constable's life. There was no desk, but between the wardrobe and the door to the hall was a glass-fronted bookcase. Murdoch walked over to it and opened it up. On the top shelf was a small army of lead cavalry soldiers, well seasoned, and a small cast-iron bank, brightly painted. A little brown dog was sitting in front of a slotted box while a harlequin clown held a hoop in front of it. Unable to resist, Murdoch fished out a penny coin from his pocket and placed it in the dog's mouth. Then he pushed down the lever and the terrier jumped through the hoop, dropped the penny into the slot, and sat down again.

The other shelves all held books, most of them seemingly left over from Wicken's boyhood. Several novels, a mix of Sir Walter Scott, Jules Verne, and Ralph Connor; the complete works of William Shakespeare in thirty-nine volumes, rather pristine. *Little Men*, a book Murdoch always intended to read and never had. A stained and obviously well-studied

edition of *Clater's Farrier* . At random, Murdoch picked out a book entitled *For Boys* . There was an inscription inside: *To my dearest Oliver on the occasion of his fifteenth birthday. With fondest regards, Mother* .

Murdoch leafed through the book, which was written by a Mrs. Shepherd. The tone was evangelical, exhorting the boy reader to have only pure thoughts in order to have a healthy body. Murdoch turned to the chapter entitled What is Sex? A doctor was quoted concerning one of his patients, a young man who complained of strange nervous symptoms. He suspected that the man's difficulties were due to some sort of sexual exhaustion. The patient replied, "Never, I never practised masturbation and never had a nocturnal emission." However, he did admit to caressing his fiancée when he visited her, and afterwards his mind became occupied with sexual fantasies. "That is the source of your problem," said the doctor. Irritated, Murdoch closed the book and returned it to the shelf. As far as he was concerned, these sorts of teachings were worth piss, the nattering of priests and women with no experience.

What else was here? Nothing remarkable. Ah, a book on etiquette that he himself had pored over years ago. He took it out with a little grin at the memory. Shy and awkward in social settings, Murdoch had tried to teach himself the rules, which unfortunately tended to make him even more self-conscious. It wasn't until he met Liza that he'd relaxed. She'd showed him what to do and laughed him out of his stiffness.

He was about to abandon the bookcase altogether when he saw that there was one book tucked away at the back of the shelf. He took it out, wondering if it had been hidden or had just fallen back there. *The Heart of Midlothian* by Sir Walter Scott. The cover matched the others in the set and this too was inscribed lovingly by Mrs. Wicken. A twelfth birthday this time. He was about to replace it when he saw that there was a thin piece of muslin pressed among the

pages. He took it out. Inside the cloth was a lock of dark brown hair. Murdoch stowed the find between the covers of his own notebook. There was nothing else he could see that might be relevant, and the overfurnished room was beginning to close in on him. He went back to the hall.

Mrs. Morrow showed him out and, as soon as he was on the street, he took a long, deep breath. He had quickly developed respect for Mrs. Wicken and he could only feel compassion for her loss. However, he sensed that beneath the gracious manners there was a will of iron. He could understand why her son might have chosen to keep certain matters from her.

Chapter Twenty-Four

HE DECIDED TO GO STRAIGHT OVER to the lending library, which was situated on Toronto Street, to the rear of St James' Cathedral. He wanted to see if he could find at least one definite confirmation of Isobel's story. Needing exercise, he walked briskly down Sackville to King Street where he could catch a streetcar. This far east, the stores were smaller, not as classy. There wasn't a line of carriages waiting outside any of them the way there always was nearer to the fancy stores on Church and Jarvis streets.

A streetcar was clanking toward him and he signalled to the driver to stop. He stepped on board into an almost empty car. The oil heater at the rear had been lit and inside was warm, smelling of the straw that was scattered on the floorboards to soak up the mud. In the middle of winter, the snow made everything a brown stew, but today the straw was still relatively fresh. Murdoch took a seat near the front and the ticket collector was on him at once, rattling his box.

"Fare please, sir."

He dropped in his ticket and the collector moved on. For a moment Murdoch almost envied him. His job seemed so clear-cut and defined. His only challenge was to keep a sharp lookout for cheaters, men who only went a couple of blocks, then, when he was busy, got off without paying. He was a young fellow, good-looking in a bold way. Destined to go far up the ranks of the Toronto Street Railway Corporation. He looked like the kind of man who would push for Sunday service. Murdoch thought the fuss about this issue was an utter waste of time. Some councillors were adamant that to have the streetcar running on the Sabbath was to propagate the work of the devil himself. Logically,

this applied only to the streetcar workers, as all taverns and hotels and places of entertainment were closed on Sunday. Murdoch himself would like to have seen the cars running, taking people out to Sunnyside on hot summer days, for instance, or church even, if that's what they wanted. He sighed at the thought. He had long hated the dead space of Sunday when the entire city went into a kind of slumber.

"Church street. Who wants Church Street?" the conductor bellowed out. Murdoch got to his feet, the conductor pulled on the bell rope to alert the driver, and the streetcar halted at the corner.

On the northeast side of King and Church was St James' Cathedral. Murdoch had passed by many times without paying much attention, but now he actually looked at it. The slender copper spire, gleaming from the recent rain, soared into the pewter sky. The buff-coloured brick was warm and inviting even on this dull day. From the outside, it looked like a Roman Catholic church. The same cruciform design, the same dignity. If he had more time, he could go in and see what the inside was like. For one reason or another, not the least being a primitive superstition, he had never disobeyed the Catholic Church's teaching about the dangers inherent in the abodes of the nonbelievers. As he walked up to the library, he chided himself. It wouldn't hurt if he started exploring.

It was so quiet in the library that entering it was not unlike stepping into a place of worship. He almost looked for the holy water font.

The newspaper reading room was to the right and he decided to start there. At the far end was a high counter, and behind it, a young woman waited patiently for requests. She was wearing a white waist with a stiff high collar and a rather masculine tie. Her fair hair was pulled up into a severe knot and she was wearing gold pince-nez. She looked highly efficient. Nonetheless, her smile was friendly as she acknowledged him.

"Today's *Globe* is the only one available at the moment, sir. Would you like that?"

Murdoch assumed the rush on the daily papers was because of the shipping disaster everybody was caught up in.

"I'm not a customer, I'm afraid. I'm a detective with the police force, number four station." He handed her his card and she took it gingerly. "I'm trying to trace the movements of one of our constables. I have reason to believe he was here on Saturday last, in the afternoon. Were you on duty at that time, Miss, er ...?" He checked the brass nameplate that was on the counter. "... Miss Morse?"

"Yes, I was."

"Perhaps you remember him? A tall fellow, about twenty-four years of age, with a blond moustache, fresh complexion."

"Does he have a name?" she asked, reaching for a small file box in front of her.

"Oliver Wicken."

Surprisingly, she looked a little flustered. "Yes, I do remember the name. He was here about three o'clock. He took the *Huntsville Forester*. It isn't often I get a request for that newspaper, so we had a little chat about it ... that's why I remember him so particularly."

Murdoch felt bad. Wicken was an attractive young man and probably not above a little harmless flirting. At least Murdoch hoped it was harmless and he wasn't going to unearth yet another fiancée.

The librarian looked at him with curiosity. "May I ask why you wish to know? He isn't in any trouble surely?"

They had both been speaking in hushed tones, but even so, an elderly gentleman wearing check knickerbockers, who was at one of the nearby stands, hissed at them.

Murdoch sidestepped her question. "Was Mr. Wicken alone?"

"Yes, he was."

Murdoch sighed. Did this mean Isobel Brewster had lied? A man came up to the counter. His clothes were shabby and he smelled stale. Murdoch knew he had come in because the library was warm and dry.

"The *Globe*, if you please," he said to Miss Morse.

She took the rolled-up newspaper from one of the cubbyholes behind her, where they were stashed, and handed it to him.

"There's a free space in the far aisle at the back," she said.

Murdoch liked her for not discriminating against the man, who more than likely couldn't read a word.

From where she was sitting, the librarian had a good view of the entire room and who came and went. Murdoch turned back to her.

"Did you notice if Mr. Wicken spoke to anybody while he was here?"

She frowned. "I believe he did. He must have met an acquaintance. They did talk briefly, as I recall."

"Could you describe the gentleman?"

"As a matter of fact it was a lady."

Several men were standing in front of the long easels where the newspapers were hung, but as far as he could see there were no women. He didn't expect anything else. Most women were still doubtful about the propriety of being in a man's domain.

He leaned forward. "Miss Morse, you have been very helpful and I'm sorry that at the moment I am not at liberty to tell you why I am making these enquiries. However, it is very important. Can you describe this woman?"

"I barely paid her any attention."

"Anything at all that you remember would be helpful. Her age, her colouring, her costume."

"Very well." She wrinkled her forehead in concentration but he knew she was pretending. She had paid a lot of

attention to Wicken's acquaintance but didn't want to admit to it.

"I believe she was quite dark, with an olive complexion, and tall. Almost as tall as Mr. Wicken himself. Perhaps a few years older than myself ... I am twenty-two. She was wearing a long waterproof, a rather smart scarlet hat with a white feather and navy ribbons."

Murdoch dragged at his moustache, relieved. *Sorry, Miss Brewster, for doubting you.*

"Did they leave together?"

"Yes, now that you mention it, I believe they did."

"Did Mr. Wicken seem distressed in any way?"

"I don't understand what you mean."

"Was their exchange amicable, would you say?"

"It appeared to be." Unconsciously the young woman sighed. "He looked quite happy to see her."

Murdoch could almost read her thoughts, the doubts that his questions were raising, but he still couldn't stomach telling her what had happened. Perhaps he could come back at a later time near the end of the day. He suspected Miss Morse might be harbouring more passion in her breast than her white starched shirtwaist might indicate. Fortunately, the knickerbockered man intervened as he returned his newspaper. Murdoch whispered a quick good-bye and left. It was time to get back to Isobel Brewster. At least one part of her testimony seemed to be true.

Isobel herself answered the door and he knew she had been waiting, jumping at every knock. He asked her to get the exact clothes she was wearing on Monday night, which she did at once. He could hear a fretful child in the background and the rather sharp hushing of a woman's voice. Isobel joined him quickly. She had put on her long waterproof and a sensible black felt hat, which had only a single piece of blue ribbon for trimming. They set off up Parliament Street and he told her that the librarian had confirmed that she

was with Wicken last Saturday. She made no comment but he could see how relieved she was.

At the corner of Queen Street, he stopped and took the piece of muslin from his notebook.

"Is this your hair, Miss Brewster?"

She hardly looked at it, but he could see she was affected. "Yes. I gave it to Ollie at Christmastime as a memento. At his request. He snipped off a piece himself when we were walking in the park."

Unasked, she took the curl and placed it close to her own hair. It was an exact match. Another point on her side.

They soon reached Sam Lee's laundry and Murdoch asked her to stand where she had been on Monday night. She did, taking up a spot close to the curb.

Murdoch pushed open the door and entered. Almost at the same time, the door at the rear opened and Foon Lee emerged.

"Can I be of assistance, sir?"

"Detective Murdoch, again, Mr. Lee. I wonder if I might speak to your father for a moment?"

The young man stared at him, not recognising him at first. Then he gave a slight bow of recognition.

"Certainly. I will fetch him simultaneously."

Murdoch was about to correct his English usage, but thought it might seem rude and he let it go. Foon went back through the rear door.

He heard a murmured conversation and Mr. Lee came out, his son close at his heels.

He put his hands together and bowed in the Chinese greeting.

"Mr. Murdoch?" He pronounced it "Mulldot."

Murdoch addressed Foon. "Will you tell your father that I am still concerned about the death of the constable. Some new evidence has come to light that I am investigating. I

have a witness outside and I would like to see if he can identify her.”

Foon translated. Lee nodded.

Murdoch went to the door. “I am going to stand here, the way the constable did that night. Will your father come close to me? If he looks out over my shoulder he will see a young woman. I would like to know if he has ever seen her before.”

Lee moved forward before his son was in mid-translation. They stood in the threshold of the laundry, the door partially open behind them. Lee was considerably shorter than Murdoch but he peered around the detective’s arm and looked at Isobel.

The Chinaman shook his head and spoke to his son. Murdoch thought he was agitated.

“My father says not. He has never clapped his eyes to this woman before in her life.”

“Is he positive she was not the one walking with Wicken on Monday night?”

“He is certain of that. He has made a positive identification of that woman during the inquest ... He wonder why you are asking him to retract his statement. A statement he made under oath.”

Murdoch sighed. “Please tell him that’s not it at all. I just wanted to make absolutely sure.”

“I do not know this person,” interjected Lee. “I have never seen her before.”

Murdoch could not tell if he was speaking the truth or not. Both of them were watching him. He was disappointed. He had put a lot of stock in this meeting.

He thanked them and went outside.

Isobel stared at him anxiously as he approached her.

“Well?”

“I’m afraid he denied it. Says you are not the woman he saw.”

“Damnation. How is that possible? Of course I was. He saw me, I know he did. I’ll talk to him ...”

Murdoch caught her by the arm. “No, Miss Brewster. It won’t do any good. He’s adamant.”

She looked as if she were about to burst into tears.

“Then you don’t believe me?”

“Of course I do. I think he was too afraid to change his sworn testimony.” He let her go and she stood in front of him, her shoulders slumped.

“What are you going to do now?” she asked.

“I am going to talk to Miss Mary Ann Trowbridge.”

He thought she was going to grasp his hand again, but she didn’t, and they headed back to her house.

Chapter Twenty-Five

JARIUS GIBB WAS NOT AT WORK . He had sent Janet with a message to say he was ill and would not be in for a few days. In a way, it was true. He felt as hot and restless as if he had a fever. He had been this way since dinner on Wednesday and nothing calmed him. Finally, he forced himself to sit at his desk, his ledger open in front of him. Janet had brought him a mug of strong coffee, milky and sweet, which he laced with a good dose of brandy. He made himself drink it slowly and deliberately before he took up his pen.

I want to fill up this page with obscenities and blasphemy, to pour out the vilest and crudest words I have ever heard, but it will not help me. He says, "You are not my own flesh and blood but you will get a bequest." As if I should be grateful, should rejoice in the pew over his generosity. He has betrayed his promise to my mother which he made in my presence. "I will treat him as my own son, my own flesh and blood. I will give him my name." And he has never. Not when he first married her, swelling with lust, he said it then. "The boy will be like my own." LIAR. And he said it at her most solemn deathbed. "He shall have my name." LIAR AGAIN. He could never love a son who did not reflect his own face back to him. He will bypass me because of the accident of blood. No son of his flesh would have behaved better than I. How many hours did I listen to him weep and complain at the loss of his wife, as if she had died on purpose to thwart him. He cared nothing that she was also my mother. And then to marry again without any consultation! It serves him right. He married weak blood and he threw weak blood. And now he would set up for more spawn. And with such a woman.

He stopped writing. He was pressing so hard he was in danger of bending his nib. He got up, went over to the fireplace, and picked up the poker. He prodded one of the lumps of coal that wasn't burning.

Fortunately, Nathaniel had agreed to have the woman spayed. Presumably that would occur soon. He hit a piece of coal hard, splitting it in two. Flames jumped up to lick at the new fuel. He pounded another piece and another until the coal was completely fractured.

Miss Trowbridge had given her address as 106 Jarvis Street. Murdoch took his second streetcar of the day and set out to talk to her. He was certain now that Mr. Lee was mistaken in his identification but afraid to admit it. However, he thought it was odd Miss Trowbridge had made no attempt to negate Lee's statement. On the other hand, witnesses often had blinkers on about matters other than their own. She must have met up with Wicken after Isobel had left.

As he headed back down Parliament toward Queen Street, he probed the hole in his gum with his tongue. His jaw was practically back to normal, as long he didn't let in too much cold air and chewed on the other side. Mrs. Kitchen had resumed her duties and sent him off with a couple of hard-boiled eggs and a jar of milk sops for his luncheon. It didn't come close to the rabbit stew that Enid had made for him, the memory of which made his mouth water. He hadn't seen her this morning but he could hear her at the typewriter quite early. Perhaps tonight they could continue the interrupted talk she so obviously wanted. Not that he was any closer to coming up with an answer, but he didn't just want to spout the church's doctrine without thinking about it.

There was a woman walking ahead of him. She halted at the corner and he saw her lift her skirt decorously to avoid a puddle as she stepped off the curb. Nevertheless, her hem

dragged through the water and he suddenly had a vivid memory of himself and Liza, sitting one evening in her kitchen. She took care of her widowed father, and when he went off to bed, they had some rare and precious privacy. On this particular occasion, she was trying to clean the skirt of her best walking suit. The hem was covered with mud. "Wretched thing. It is always dirty." If she had lived, he knew she would have become an agitator for many reforms for women, including the adoption of what was currently called Rational Dress. "Why shouldn't I be able to wear a sensible shorter skirt without being leered at, or insulted?" she'd demanded. He'd stupidly tried to make light of the issue with a lewd joke and she was angry with him. "How can you be so clever about some things and so nobby about others? I wish you'd open up your mind."

They'd eventually worked their way to a reasonable talk about her point of view, but her words had stung and he still thought about them.

He was checking the house numbers now. One hundred and six was a big house of yellow brick, gables painted in the popular hunter green. Shrubs filled the large front yard, held in by a very fancy wrought-iron fence. The gate squeaked when he opened it and, on closer inspection, he could see the shrubs were shapeless and too bushy. There were weeds in the cracks of the flagstone path. The house might be grand but it looked neglected. He tugged at the bell-pull, hearing it clang inside the house. The bay windows to his right showed more care than the grounds. They were curtained with white lace, hung halfway up the window in the fashionable style. So far, nobody had answered, and he was about to ring again when the door creaked open. An elderly woman stood at the threshold, scrutinising him with a distinctly unfriendly expression. She wore a black silk dress and a white mobcap. There was a chatelaine at her waist which jingled slightly. He was somewhat surprised that

the housekeeper had answered the door, but he gave her a polite smile and tipped his hat.

She frowned. "What do you want?"

"I'd like to speak to Miss Trowbridge."

"Who?"

"Miss Mary Ann Trowbridge. I understand she lives here."

"Who are you?"

Murdoch handed her his calling card. "Acting Detective Murdoch."

The housekeeper, if that was who she was, studied his card, even reversing it as if there were more information on the back.

"She isn't here."

She handed it back to him.

"When will she return? It is important I speak to her."

"She won't."

"Won't what?"

"Return."

"Do you mean she's left the city?"

"No, I mean she won't return, seeing as how she's never lived here."

Murdoch bit back a retort. If the woman needed to play games with him, he wasn't going to give her the satisfaction of getting riled up.

"Ma'am, this is an important police matter and I would appreciate your cooperation. Does a Mrs. Avison live here?"

"She does, but you can't talk to her because she hasn't finished her breakfast yet."

Murdoch reached inside his coat and fished out his watch, looking at it ostentatiously.

"My, it's half past two in the afternoon. Is your mistress an invalid then?"

She scowled at him and was about to close the door but he got his foot in just in time. He summoned as stern an expression as he could, although he had no desire to act the bully with such a tiny shrivelled old woman.

"I repeat, this is a police matter. If you don't go this minute and tell your mistress I would like to talk to her, I will be forced to come in and find her myself."

The servant stared back at him and he thought there was a glint of amusement in her eyes. *The old crow. She actually enjoyed that little contest*. He stepped into the hall.

"I'll wait here."

With a loud sniff of disapproval, she shuffled away down the hall. He watched her draw back the portieres in front of a door to the right, tap, and enter. He looked around. The hall was unusually spacious, large enough to accommodate several chairs, an imposing coat tree, and a fine marble fireplace, which was still protected by a brass screen as if it were summer. The place felt cold and gloomy. The only natural light came through the door windows, and although there was a splendid chandelier of crystal glass, none of the candles were lit. There were so many paintings on the wall, the crimson flock covering was almost obscured. As far as he could tell, they were all portraits. In spite of the grandeur of the house, there wasn't a sign of any other servants. No butler came hurrying out to take charge, no maids en route to some task. The silence, the cold musty air, made him feel as if he were in a mausoleum. It seemed an old-fashioned, gloomy house for a young, pretty girl like Mary Ann to live in.

The rear door opened and the housekeeper emerged. She beckoned to him and he approached her.

"Mrs. Avison will see you. She doesn't hear so good so make sure you speak up and don't mumble."

"I make a point of never mumbling," said Murdoch, but any irony was lost and he felt petty for even attempting it.

"Good," she said and moved a few inches out of the way so he could enter.

Like the hall, the room was dark, but at least there was a cheerful fire going in the fireplace. A woman was seated close to it in a large armchair. She was wearing a man's

maroon silk dressing gown and her white hair was in a loose braid down her back. As he came in, she reached for a hearing trumpet and held it to her ear.

"What is it you want, sir? I couldn't make head nor tails of what Beulah was saying." She waved her hand at the chair opposite her. "Sit down, for goodness' sake. Beulah, go and fetch another cup. I'm sure he'd be glad of some coffee; it's perishing out there." Her voice was strident.

Murdoch did as he was told, putting his damp hat beside him on the floor. In spite of her white hair, Mrs. Avison was by no means an invalid, nor elderly; more likely she was in her late middle age. He decided her unorthodox dress and willingness to receive him the way she was must be cultivated eccentricity. She didn't wait for the housekeeper to leave before she said, "Beulah's been with me since we were both children. She started out as the nursery maid. She fusses over me in exactly the same way she did then." She aimed the trumpet in his direction. "Go on then, explain yourself."

He leaned forward. It was rather like playing a trombone in reverse.

"I want to speak to your niece, Miss Mary Ann Trowbridge. I apologise for intruding at such an unhappy time but I would like to ask her a few more questions concerning Oliver Wicken."

Mrs. Avison heard perfectly and she looked at him, puzzled.

"I don't know what in Hades you are talking about. There's no such person here. I'm a widow and I live alone except for Beulah. You've made a mistake."

It was Murdoch's turn to be taken aback. "You don't have a niece named Mary Ann who testified at the coroner's inquest on Tuesday?"

"I certainly don't. Neither niece nor nephew. Thank goodness for that, I might add."

"The young woman gave this address and produced a letter purporting to be from her aunt, Mrs. Avison."

"What sort of letter?"

"Corroborating her statement that she was engaged to a young man named Oliver Wicken."

"It certainly was not I who wrote the letter."

The housekeeper came back in carrying a china cup and saucer that could have belonged to a child's tea set.

"Beulah, listen to this story."

"Just a minute." She went to the sideboard, poured out some coffee from a silver pot, and brought the cup to Murdoch. He had only drunk coffee on three occasions in his life and then it came liquid from a bottle and was loaded with milk and sugar. Cautiously, he sipped at the dark fragrant brew.

"We always serve it black," said Mrs. Avison. "It's an abomination to do otherwise. You like coffee, don't you?"

"I do now," he said.

"So, tell Beulah what you just told me."

The housekeeper, who might also have been hard of hearing, didn't wait for him.

"I remembered while I was getting the cup. We used to have a servant here named Mary Ann. She was the upstairs maid. About ten or eleven years ago it was. But her last name wasn't Trowbridge, it was Trotter. What's this woman look like that you're after?"

"She has light brown hair, fair skin, rather dainty features, grey eyes. Probably about twenty or so."

Beulah nodded with satisfaction. "Same one. She always looked young for her age. I'm not surprised as a policeman is after her. She only lasted a couple of months with us. Got the shoot on account of immorality."

Mrs. Avison had been trying to follow the conversation but she couldn't and said in exasperation, "What are you blathering about, Beulah?"

The housekeeper shouted everything into the trumpet. Murdoch drank more of the delicious coffee.

Mrs. Avison nodded vigorously. "I recollect the girl now. Why in Hades is she pretending I'm her aunt? She was the maid here."

"I don't know the answer to that, Mrs. Avison. I wish I did."

"Looked like butter wouldn't melt in her mouth but she was as sly a minx as ever I did see."

"What exactly did she do to be dismissed?"

"Got herself in the family way, that's what," Beulah answered. "She was barely sixteen. Wicked."

"So, she married then?"

Mrs. Avison heard that one. "She did not. One of our gardeners was quite willing to take her but she refused."

"Was he the father?"

She clucked her tongue in disapproval. "He said he wasn't but she wouldn't tell us who it was. She probably didn't know."

"Did she marry anybody? I might need to seek under her married name."

Mrs. Avison waved her trumpet at Beulah, who answered for her. "As far as we know she did not. She left. The gardener's name was Crenshawe but he married somebody else soon after anyway, so there's no sense talking to him."

"Is the name Oliver Wicken familiar to you?"

She shook her head. "No. Never heard of him."

"You said they were engaged," interrupted Mrs. Avison. "Why is that of concern to the police? Has he abandoned her?"

Murdoch explained as succinctly as he could what had transpired. They listened attentively.

"Did Mary Ann stay in touch with any of the other servants? Is there anybody here that I could talk to?"

"No. I told you I live by myself with Beulah. I let them all go. Servants are an expense and a bother as far as I'm

concerned. Any extra help we get in from time to time. We manage quite well, don't we, Beulah?"

The housekeeper ignored the question, intent on pursuing the more lascivious topic of Mary Ann Trotter.

"One of the maids did run into the girl the year after she'd left us. She told her the child had been stillborn. Whether that was true or not it was certainly convenient. But Agnes said she didn't look respectable at all."

"What did she mean by that?"

"She'd become a fallen woman," Beulah said in the tone of one who takes pride in calling a spade a spade.

Chapter Twenty-Six

MURDOCH WAS BEHIND HIS DESK , Constable Crabtree seated in front of him.

“George, what’s your opinion? Why’d she give us the runaround?”

“My guess is she’s still in the game and doesn’t want anybody to know.”

“Do you think she really was engaged to Wicken?”

“Hard to tell. She might have said that to pretty it up. She wasn’t about to come right out and say he was having some dock on the side and paying for it.”

“Would a man kill himself over a prostitute giving him the shove?”

“Some men are stupid enough for anything. The doxy hands him a line about how he’s the only one she’s ever loved, all other men are as eunuchs compared to him. He makes her happy. What man wouldn’t like to hear that? He believes her, gets besotted, starts to make a nuisance of himself. She’s bored, says that’s it, no more, and he thinks life is over. Bang.”

Murdoch stared at the constable. Crabtree was a happily married man with five small children, one a newborn. He spoke with such authority, it made him wonder.

“What is puzzling me, George, is why she came forward at all. Wouldn’t it have been better for her to keep quiet? She could assume nobody knew about her.” He drummed his fingers on the desk. “On the other hand, we could be maligning her. We don’t know for certain that she’s a doxy or ever was.”

“She just happened to lie under oath for no reason.”

Murdoch grinned. “A point, George.”

"She said she read about his death in the newspaper. Maybe she's one of those women who just want to make mischief, or get in on the limelight. She could adapt her story to whatever circumstances revealed themselves. If he'd been married she could have said the same thing. 'Oh, he loved me but I sent him back to his lawful wife.' Cow leavings like that."

"You're saying maybe Trowbridge didn't know Wicken at all."

"Yes, sir. Made it up."

"What about the letter from her aunt?"

"We haven't seen the woman in person and she certainly isn't Mrs. Avison of Jarvis Street."

"Hm. I'm wondering if Wicken was the father of the child she conceived when she was fifteen."

"That'd make him fourteen at the time."

"It happens, George. Let's say she revealed this to him. He is overcome by remorse and, after she leaves, he mulls it over to the point of despondency and takes his own life."

"That wasn't the wording of the note."

"You're right. Cancel the fathering theory. Having been in Wicken's home, I can't imagine he'd have been allowed within ten feet of a girl when he was fourteen."

"Maybe we dismissed the inspector's speculations too soon, sir."

"You mean that one of the women shot him?"

"Yes, sir."

"I have to eliminate Isobel Brewster. If she's lying to us, I'm going to throw in the towel on policing, because she's convinced me."

"Be careful what you say, sir. You always were a softie for a girl in a faint."

"Do you think so?" Murdoch asked in surprise. He rubbed his hands hard over his scalp.

"Let's go over this again." He took a piece of paper from his drawer and drew a square.

"Here's the house at the corner where we found him. Isobel Brewster has walked up Parliament with him. The timing as she told it to me fits. They stay on the porch because, for some reason, Wicken hasn't let on he has a key."

"Perhaps he didn't want her to linger. He's got an assignation with Miss Trowbridge."

"True. Anyway, they stand here for at least a half an hour, maybe longer. She is threatening to break off their relationship unless he sets a date for the wedding. A half an hour is plausible, isn't it, George? Especially if they've talked about it before."

"You can have a barney in less time than that, sir. Take it from me."

"All right, Miss Brewster leaves. Wicken now encounters Miss Trowbridge. They go inside the empty house. She is still in the game but wants to go respectable. They quarrel. She wants to marry, he spurns her, says he already has a respectable sweetheart. She grabs his revolver and shoots him. Then she prints a note that suggests suicide and cool as a cucumber comes to the inquest to reinforce her story that he was the rejected one. What about that?"

Crabtree grinned. "I'd say that's a good one, sir. 'Course, it does depend on a slip of a girl being able to get the better of a healthy six-foot-tall man."

"She took him by surprise. This would also be some explanation for the position of the gun. She was in a rage with him and stuffed the revolver in between his legs in some sort of symbol."

"You've got a good imagination, sir."

"And it's getting us nowhere. We've got to find the mysterious Miss Trowbridge. First off, I want you to go round to all the newspapers. Put an advertisement in the personal columns. Give them her description, say we'd like to get in touch with her further to the death of Oliver Wicken."

Anybody knowing her whereabouts should contact us at once."

"Are we offering a reward?"

"Probably not. There's no money. I'm going to go back to his beat; do all that again. You can join me after."

At that moment, they heard somebody coming down the hall to the cubicle.

"Murdoch?"

The reed strips were shoved aside and Inspector Brackenreid came in. He couldn't go too far with Crabtree sitting where he was and they sashayed for a moment as the constable tried to stand and get out of the way. Murdoch groaned to himself. If Brackenreid came looking for him instead of having him brought up to his office, it usually meant trouble. He, too, stood respectfully. Crabtree managed to squeeze against the wall and it was too awkward for the three of them to all be standing. The inspector took the chair. Murdoch sat down again.

"Yes, sir?"

"I was wondering how you're getting on with the Wicken case?"

"I was just going over the possibilities with Constable Crabtree."

"Go over them with me."

Murdoch related his visit to Mrs. Avison. Brackenreid looked gloomy.

"I see. That's all we need, a Jezebel mixed up with one of our officers."

"None of this is proven, sir. The housekeeper was relating another servant's judgement on the young woman. However, this has cast doubt on her testimony."

"It's beginning to look like it was a pack of lies. Our young buck must have got himself mired in some tail. I've seen it before. Men who get wet-eyed over a fen, promising to give them a better life. As if they ever want it!"

Murdoch tried not to look at Crabtree. The inspector was notorious for his cynical statements about human nature. "*I've seen it before* " was a covert catch-all phrase among the officers.

Brackenreid tapped the piece of paper in front of Murdoch.

"You fancy drawings, don't you? You should have been a general. But you can sit here and draw pictures until the cows come home and it won't get us any closer to knowing what the hell happened. You need to find that Trowbridge girl."

"That's a good idea, sir."

Crabtree winced. Will was at it again.

Brackenreid glanced up sharply at the detective, but Murdoch was a master at the blank look when he needed to be.

"I think you're on to something. It's not unlikely we are, in fact, looking at a murder."

It was a tidy proposition, but even though he was the one who'd presented it, Murdoch knew the danger of prejudice. Mary Ann Trotter may have been a prostitute at one time in her life. It didn't mean she still was or that immorality and murder were always bedfellows.

"I want a report on my desk by tomorrow afternoon."

"Yes, sir."

The inspector got up. He obviously wanted to leave in a commanding way, but it was impossible as he had to press himself past Crabtree with uncomfortable intimacy.

As soon as he was out of earshot, both men grinned at each other.

"You'll go too far one of these days, Mr. Murdoch. He's not as thick as he likes to pretend."

"I know. It's the only thing that keeps me from asking for a transfer. He hasn't completely lost his wits."

He reached for his sealskin coat. "You get off to the papers. I'm going to see if Miss Trowbridge-Trotter was noticed by anybody, anywhere, anytime."

Chapter Twenty-Seven

FRANZ LIEPMAN WAS EATING HIS BREAKFAST . He'd toasted two slices of bread in front of the fire and made a pot of strong tea with lacings of sugar and a tot of rum against the damp. He yawned. For more than ten years he had not had a complete night's sleep. Four hours in the evening before he went to the Foresters building where he was the night watchman, sometimes a nap there in the back room, but he had to be careful. Occasionally an hour or two before he went to his second job, sweeping floors at the general hospital. He was used to it, probably couldn't have slept an entire night through if it was offered. He did this all week long and never took time off unless he was sick.

Once at the hall, he'd overheard two of the men talking about him. "He's a bit simple is what it is," said one of them. Franz had been hurt by this remark, but his mother was alive then and she had scoffed. "Let them think it. Clever people are noticed and you don't want that. Not as you're German." And she made him a nice apple cake to make up for the hurt. "I've told you, family is the only thing you can rely on. Blood is what counts."

For as long as he could remember, there had only been the two of them and, now she was gone; there was no family, no blood ties to turn to. However, the necessity of having two jobs when she became ill had turned into a habit. He continued to live frugally and the extra money that accumulated he kept in a strongbox under his bed. There was a lot of it by now and sometimes he wondered if he should do anything and he'd take out a few dollars. But then he'd sit and think about it, and realise he could make do. His trousers got a good brush and his boots another

blackening. So, most of the time, he put the money back. His mother taught him that. "Don't let any women know how much you have or they'll try to seduce you and take it all." He never quite knew what it was to seduce but he could tell it was bad. His mother had been born in Germany and had come to Canada just after he was born. She wouldn't talk about his father no matter how much he begged, and although she had received occasional letters for a while, they hadn't come for years now.

Even though force of habit had kept him up, he'd not gone to work at all since Monday night. He sent the neighbour's boy with a note to Mr. Tweedie saying as how he regretted but he was incapacitated for work. It took him almost an hour to write those two lines, but in the end he was proud of his big word. He didn't go the next day either.

"You'd better go tell the police," the secretary had said when Franz spilled out his story. But he wouldn't consider it. The police were always on the lookout for culprits, and they didn't care who they got, especially if they were foreigners. He could end up in jail for the rest of his life and nobody would be the wiser. No, he was very sorry he'd spoken up at all.

It was only because the cries he'd heard were so disturbing that he'd told Mr. Tweedie about them.

Darkness was well settled in and the street lamps were struggling without much success to throw out some light in the gloom. A few passersby, bent under their black umbrellas, hurried to get out of the drizzle that had started up again. Murdoch had started at Queen Street, knocking on every single door, and it had taken him almost two hours. He was tired and disheartened and his mouth felt dry from too much talking. Almost all of the people he spoke to had heard about Wicken's death, and they were eager to discuss it with him. Much as he would have expected, there was not much sympathy for the dead man, who was considered to

be a disgrace and a coward to boot. Opinion ran cool toward Mrs. Wicken and the word “unfeeling” was said many times, even though for most of them this opinion on her conduct was based on hearsay. Enthusiasm was high for Mary Ann, and his questions concerning her engendered a great deal of curiosity, which he tried to diffuse. The Lees were mostly referred to as “the heathens” and he knew that, if he had introduced them into the investigation at all, speculation would have run riot. He was, in turn, asked questions, most of them prurient. He had no answer to “Was it true there was blood and brains splattered all over the walls?” Sometimes the question was asked as bluntly as that, sometimes with more subtlety, but the reason was the same – they wanted to feast on the morbid details. However, so far, he had no more information than when he had started out. If Mary Ann Trowbridge had met up with Wicken anywhere along this section of his beat, nobody had seen her. He gave out Isobel’s description as well but with the same result. At least he didn’t have to worry about the nocturnal habits of Toronto citizenry. They all seemed to enjoy the untroubled sleep of the righteous. And Mr. Lee was unusual in that he worked late into the night. No other business owner had. Murdoch groaned to himself. At this rate, he wouldn’t get home until ten o’clock, certainly too late to visit with Mrs. Jones.

On the southwest corner of Parliament Street and Gerrard, directly across from the vacant house where Wicken had died, was the imposing Foresters Hall. Lights were burning in the downstairs windows and, hoping to find a caretaker who might have been awake on the night in question, he went in. The double front doors were unlocked and he entered a large foyer. There was a fine brass and crystal chandelier suspended from the ceiling, all the globes extravagantly lit. A splendid staircase curved in front of him and there was an imposing line of portraits ascending to the

second floor. He assumed these were depictions of officers of the order.

There was nobody in sight, but to his right was a half-open door and he could hear the now familiar tapping of a typewriter. A plaque on the door said H. TWEEDIE, SECRETARY . He knocked and a strong male voice called, "Enter." Murdoch complied. A young man, presumably Mr. Tweedie, was seated behind a long desk. Several bound ledgers were piled around him like a barricade, and he seemed to be copying something from one of them. There was an electric light suspended above his head and he wore a green eyeshade to protect himself from its brilliance.

"Yes?"

"My name is Murdoch. I'm an acting detective at number four station and I'm pursuing some inquiries concerning the death of one of our constables. No doubt you've heard about it?"

The secretary pushed back his visor. "I'll say. Did himself in, didn't he? Don't understand that, I must say. I mean we all have our trials and tribulations, don't we? But we've got to keep going. As far as I'm concerned, suicide is a coward's way out. However, I digress. How can I be of assistance?"

"The investigation isn't completely closed and I was wondering if you employ a night watchman at all. If so, I'd like to talk to him."

"Yes, we do. Fellow by the name of Franz Liepman. Didn't he get in touch with you?"

"No. Should he have?"

"I told him to. But then again, I'm not surprised he didn't. He's a strange bird, bit slow on the uptake, German. He came in here on Tuesday with quite a story. I'd heard about the constable from one of our members so I thought it might be relevant. Told him to get to the station right away."

Murdoch stared at him. The green eyeshade made his face look sickly but his brown eyes were keen enough.

"Well, he didn't. What was his story?"

"He claims he heard somebody crying. Pitiful was the way he described it. Like this, he said." Tweedie put his head back and cried in a falsetto voice, "Don't leave me, please don't leave me."

"A woman?"

"Oh, no, it must have been the constable. He was beseeching his lady-love." Tweedie looked as if he were about to howl again. Murdoch cut him off.

"Did he say where the cries were coming from?"

"The vacant house."

"What time was this?"

"Franz was on his way here and he usually arrives about half past midnight, so it was shortly before that."

"Do you have this man's address?"

"Matter of fact, it's right here." The secretary propelled his chair toward the end of his table and rotated a card file that was sitting beside the telephone box. He rolled back and handed a card to Murdoch. "He hasn't been in since Tuesday. Sent a message to say he's ill. Too much of a coincidence, if you ask me. He looked like he'd shit his britches, begging your pardon, when I said he should speak to the police. Like I said, he's a strange sort of fellow. But he's been with us for years, no complaints. First time he's been off sick for six years. Hasn't missed a day."

Murdoch checked the address. "I'll go and have a word with him. Thank you, Mr. Tweedie."

"You're welcome I'm sure." He regarded Murdoch with keen curiosity. "Do you mind if I ask why the investigation isn't closed? I popped down to the inquest myself, my own backyard as it were. The verdict was unequivocal, wasn't it?"

"It was but there are a few discrepancies in some of the testimony that we need to clarify."

"The Chinaman's? What a pair they were."

"I'm not at liberty to go into it at the moment."

“Well, any time I can help, just drop in. Oh, by the way, I recommend you take a deep breath and hold it when you go into the fellow’s place.” He made a gesture of pinching his nostrils. “He doesn’t believe in soap and water.”

“Thanks for the warning.”

Murdoch took his leave and left. The typewriter soon resumed its rapid clacking.

Mr. Liepman lived at 375 Gerrard Street, just east of Sackville. The house was a tall semi-detached with a narrow strip of paved front yard and a brown painted door that needed freshening up. The front window was dark, but slits of light came through the blinds at the second- and third-floor windows. There was an outside bell and the clapper was fastened to a frayed rope. He rang it as loudly as he could, given that the casing was cracked. He expected he’d have to repeat this several times before somebody heard him but, surprisingly, there was a response almost immediately. Through the glass, he saw light from a candle drawing closer. The door opened and an elderly man stood there, his candlestick held aloft.

“The room’s taken,” he said before Murdoch could speak.

“I’m not here for the room, I’m looking for Mr. Liepman.”

“He’s on the third floor.”

The old man didn’t wait for Murdoch to introduce himself or express any curiosity; he turned around and began to shuffle back to his lair. He took his candle with him.

“Wait a minute,” Murdoch called but the man ignored him and entered a door on the left. Murdoch heard a bolt shoot closed. The hall was completely unlit and there was a strong smell of raw onions hanging in the air. On the other hand it could have been skunk. Cussing at the old man for his rudeness, Murdoch stood for a moment to get accustomed to the darkness. There was a staircase to his left and the room at the landing was occupied. Enough light came from

beneath the door for him to make his way up. The stairs were uncarpeted and creaked loudly but nobody came out to see who he was or what he was doing. He didn't hear anything – no voices, no sounds of life behind the closed doors.

The stairs to the third floor became narrow and steep and again the only light came from beneath a door at the top of the landing. He slid his hand along the railing and more or less felt his way to the top. Here there was some sign of life, a man's voice speaking rather softly in a language he didn't understand but assumed was German. It sounded as if he were reading aloud. Murdoch rapped hard on the door. The voice stopped abruptly but there was no movement. He knocked again.

"Mr. Liepman, I'm a police officer and I would like to talk to you."

No response. Murdoch was getting thoroughly annoyed. He thumped hard with his fist on the door. "Mr. Liepman, please open up."

A squeak and scrape of a chair, the door opened a crack, and a frightened face peered out at him. Murdoch had expected an older man but Liepman was of middle age. His hair was long about his shoulders and he had a full, untrimmed dark beard. He was wearing a red flannel combination suit under a pair of loose trousers.

"Mr. Liepman, I'm Acting Detective Murdoch from number four station. I have just come from the Foresters Hall. The secretary told me you had some information concerning the death of one of our constables."

Liepman stared at him for so long, Murdoch wondered if he had understood anything. He was about to repeat himself when the man said, "I have been ill. I couldn't have come." He had a pronounced German accent, turning his *v*'s into *f*'s.

"I'm not here to reproach you or charge you with anything, Mr. Liepman. I'm pursuing an inquiry into the

death of this officer.”

“I thought the verdict was for self-murder.”

The man wasn’t as ignorant as he first appeared. “Yes, but there are a few matters I’d like to clear up. Can I come in?”

Reluctantly, Liepman stepped aside and Murdoch went into the tiny attic room. Tweedie was right about the smell. It was far worse than the odour downstairs. He tried to breathe lightly.

“I was just having my tea,” said Liepman and he indicated a pine table tucked underneath the window. There was a cup and the remnants of a meat pie on a plate. A black book was turned face down beside it. Could have been a Bible.

“I won’t keep you.”

Murdoch had been annoyed with the old man who let him in, but this one’s lack of manners was more forgivable. It seemed less deliberate and more as if he simply wasn’t used to company. Unexpectedly, there was the sound of birdsong, a cascade of trills and chirps. At first, Murdoch couldn’t see where it was coming from, then he noticed a small cage in the corner of the room, next to the hearth. Inside was a dainty yellow and black finch. It shook out its feathers, raised its beak, and let out another series of whistles. Liepman grinned. “She likes to show off.”

“That’s a beautiful song.”

“Yes, we’ve won competitions. Her name’s Jenny Lind. She’s named after the singer. My mother heard her when she did the only show she ever performed in Toronto. Fifty-three it was. I was only five years old but she took me too. It cost Mutter a week’s wages but she didn’t care. It was worth it. I name all my birds the same now. This is Miss Jenny Lind the eighth, or is it ninth?”

The little bird preened herself, then took a sip of water from the dish inside her cage, for all the world like a diva warming up for her performance.

Murdoch glanced around the tiny room. The furnishings were spare but whether that was from penury or from

choice, he didn't know. The walls sloped and there was only one small window. It must be hot as Hades in summer. At the moment, however, it was comfortably warm and, in contrast to the rest of the house, well-lit and cheery. There was a fire going in the fireplace and a kettle was steaming on the hob. This was obviously where Mr. Liepman cooked his meals. He hadn't invited him to sit, but Murdoch pulled out a chair and sat down at the table.

"Mr. Tweedie said that you heard the sound of somebody crying on Monday night. Can you tell me more about it?"

"What would you like to know?" Liepman had plumped himself down in the single armchair by the fire but he jumped up again, went over to the cage, and shook out some seed for the bird.

"Could you describe this sound?"

"Oh, yes. Piteous, it was. Made my blood run cold."

"Were they words or just cries?"

"Words."

"What were they?"

"'Help me, help me.'"

That wasn't what Mr. Tweedie had said.

"Mr. Liepman, could you swear an oath that those words were exactly what you heard?"

The other man looked frightened.

"What I mean is that we often recall things differently from the way they actually happened. I may for instance insist that a friend said to me, 'We must have a chat,' when in fact what they said was 'I'd like to get together for a talk.'"

Liepman was staring at Murdoch. He tried again. "All I am asking, sir, is if, to your recollection, these were the precise words. Mr. Tweedie has reported it rather differently."

"Has he?" He scowled. "Well, he can go stuff himself in his filing cabinet for all I care. I heard plain as you're talking to me, 'Help me. Help me.' And that's the gospel truth, may I be put on the rack and not change my mind."

"Were the words repeated several times or twice like that?"

"Only twice."

"What made you think it was the constable?"

"Eh?"

"Mr. Tweedie said you thought it was the officer who died."

"I didn't say that. It was him who said it must have been."

"He imitated the sounds for me and they could have come more from a woman."

"I did think that at first. That it was a woman, but according to Mr. Clever, it couldn't have been."

"Did the cries come from the empty house?"

"Thereabouts." Liepman clicked his tongue at Jenny Lind but she didn't respond, just continued to dig into her flight feathers.

Murdoch sighed. "I must repeat what I said earlier, Mr. Liepman, you are not in any kind of trouble. But it would be more than helpful if you could be exact. You were walking by on your way to the hall; at what point did you hear the noises?"

"Just as I was going past the livery." He turned around and faced Murdoch. His face was tight with anxiety. "Mr. Tweedie said sound at night is difficult to pinpoint, travels around. He's the one convinced it was coming from the house. I'd have said it was behind me rather than in front. But he knows best."

"Did you hear a gunshot?"

Liepman was emphatic. "No. Not so much as a pop. Just the cries."

"And what time was this?"

"About twenty minutes past twelve. I get to the hall at half past."

"That is your regular route to work, I presume? Have you ever seen the constable on his beat? Tall fellow, blond whiskers and moustache."

"I see him most every night. He's regular and so am I."

"Did you see him on Monday?"

"No. I did wonder at it."

"Have you ever seen him accompanied by anybody else?"

"Once or twice he was with the sergeant."

"On Monday night, did you notice a young woman on the street?"

"No, it was too late for women to be out."

"You're certain?"

"Absolutely. Everybody is in bed by the time I go to work. I'd notice if it was different."

"When you heard these cries, did you see anything? Did you look up at the windows, for instance?"

Liepman shook his head emphatically. "Mutter said never to look at devils. If you did, you would go up in a puff of smoke."

"You thought these cries, piteous as you describe them, might have not been human?"

"Devils can take all kinds of shapes."

"Indeed they can."

He focused on the little finch again. "I don't want to get anybody in trouble. I won't, will I?"

"I don't think so, Mr. Liepman. You have been very helpful."

Murdoch looked at the book that was on the table. It was a Bible. There didn't seem to be any other books in the room, as far as he could see. He stood up. That was probably all he was going to get out of the man. Realising they were done, Liepman cheered up. He took the lamp from the mantelpiece.

"I'll see you down. Mr. Henry won't leave any candles out. He's afraid of fire."

As they left, the finch let loose with a glorious torrent of song.

An image had leaped into Murdoch's mind. A young woman tied to a chair, trying to reach out to him, whispering, "Help me, please help me."

Chapter Twenty-Eight

SHE FELT AS IF SHE WERE RECOVERING from an illness, a fever that had distorted her view of the world. The strict routine of the asylum, the orderliness, was actually helping to bring about clarity. However, this served to intensify her fear and her isolation. She could see only too well what she faced and she was threading her way like a cat on a mantel.

During the day, there was little to distract her from her thoughts. Mrs. Foster was coherent but childlike, and she soon gave up on any attempt to communicate with the other women. Trying to hold on to their sanity was like catching a bird in cupped hands. The attendants had a lot to do and were still wary of her. Fortunately, Miss Bastedo had made sure she was given some tray covers to embroider and it helped to while away the time. When she was in the orphanage, she had been taught fine sewing and she had become adept at it, enjoying the praise she garnered for her neat stitching. After Harry died she tried to support herself and Charley by doing dressmaking. Unfortunately, there was a plethora of skilled dressmakers in the city and she never had enough work. It was at this point Nathaniel Eakin had entered her life, by chance, looking for someone to sew for his ailing wife. Peg couldn't really understand why he had been so smitten with her but it was clear he was. After his wife's death and when he was scarcely out of mourning, he had proposed marriage. Seeing no alternative, she accepted.

On Friday Miss Bastedo announced that the Lippincott choir was coming to sing for them that evening. Peg felt a surge of excitement at the prospect of contact with the outside world. Then the reality of her situation rushed in on

her. Nobody had visited her yet and she was still wearing the institutional clothes, cotton drawers and chemise, a petticoat, grey woollen dress and a stiff white pinafore. They were the regulation apparel worn by all the charity patients and she felt ashamed to be seen by normal people. Briefly, she considered begging off as being unwell, but after the plates were taken away, the attendants ushered all the women into the sitting room and she filed in with Mrs. Foster on her arm.

The Lippincott church choir was already there. Seven of them, five women and two men. They were used to the asylum and didn't gawk or pay any attention, instead sorting through their music sheets or chatting to each other quietly. There were four rows of chairs for the patients set up in a semicircle in front of the piano, but the rear seats were already occupied. Peg's hope of sitting inconspicuously at the back was dashed.

"Who are those women?" she whispered to Mrs. Foster. They were all in the asylum clothes, many of them with white mobcaps. There was an air of restless energy surrounding them, as they fidgeted and looked around them. Various looks – bewilderment, fear, suspicion.

"They're from second floor," replied Emma. "It's not fair of Miss Bastedo to bring them in but she always does. Says it calms them down. Which it doesn't, in my opinion. They don't pay attention and shout out at the most inappropriate moments."

Peg felt afraid of the strangeness of these women and made sure that she was one row removed as she sat down. That put her in direct line of vision with the women of the choir, but it was the lesser of two evils. She scanned them quickly, relieved that there was nobody she knew in the group.

Mrs. Foster leaned up closer and spoke into her ear. "Whatever you do, don't get too close to the woman who's

sitting at the end of the row at the back. The one in the bonnet."

Peg glanced quickly behind her. The woman in question was small and thin with haggard features. She was sitting quietly but her lips were moving in a conversation only she could hear.

"She's had ringworm. It's very contagious. She shouldn't be here but matron is always letting the old-timers get away with things. She's been in this place for twenty-two years."

"My Lord. She doesn't look much into middle age."

"She was twenty-six years old when she was admitted."

"The same age as me."

"There you go then," said Emma ambiguously. "I've been here seven years, three months, and fourteen days tomorrow."

That wasn't what she'd said before but Peg didn't challenge her. "Wouldn't you like to leave?"

Mrs. Foster shrugged. "I have left more than once, but I've had to come back."

"Why?"

"I didn't get along with my daughter-in-law." She hesitated and began to pleat her skirt, nervously.

"Why didn't you?" Peg asked.

"She said I stole things."

"Oh, I see."

The other woman looked up at Peg in confusion. "Sometimes I take things that I know people would give me anyway. That's not so wicked, is it?"

"I don't think so but perhaps it would be better to ask them first."

"Oh, no. They wouldn't give them to me then." Mrs. Foster's eyes filled with sudden tears. "She's a good girl, is Letty. I miss her so much. She's been like a daughter to me."

She began to weep with increasing fervour. Mrs. Reid, who was talking to the choir leader, came over.

“What is it, Mrs. Foster?”

“Hurt,” said the old woman in a child’s voice and touched her chest.

“Did you say something to her?” the attendant asked Peg.

She shook her head. “No, I did not. She mentioned her daughter-in-law and that seemed to upset her.”

Reid took a handkerchief out of her pocket and wiped at Mrs. Foster’s face. “Come on, where’s my sunshine smile? We want to set a good example, don’t we?”

Emma sniffed away the tears and gave her a wan little smile.

“Lovely. That’s what I like to see. Now I need to have one more word with Mrs. Greenwood. Shall I ask them to sing ‘Annie Laurie’ for you?”

“Yes, please.”

Reid straightened up, gave Peg a warning don’t-do-anything-else glance, and returned to the choir mistress.

Emma examined the handkerchief, which was of good linen with a deep black border.

“Poor Reid’s brother died this year. She was very fond of him.”

She put it in her pocket.

One of the choir members was at the piano. She struck a note; the others hummed to get the right pitch. Then Mrs. Greenwood faced them, lifted her arms, and they all rose, music held straight out in front of them. A patient from the rear seats shouted out, “Hurray.”

“And ...”

They burst into a boisterous rendition of “Bringing in the Sheaves.”

Peg felt a surge of grief that tightened in her throat. If only she could get up and walk across that small patch of floor and be with them, the normal ones, the ones who could leave when they wanted to; the ones who could go to a home where they were safe.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

IT WAS REMARKABLE THAT THE REAL BUSINESS that occurred at the house on Sydenham Street was undetected. Clara Doherty told her neighbours that she was a music teacher who lived with her four orphaned nieces and her housekeeper. She was strict about secrecy. Customers entered the house by way of a lane at the rear and were accepted by referral only. The whores were available at certain times and no other. Most of the men came directly after working hours, some few before work, although only Rose was willing to do that, the other girls preferring to sleep in.

The setup of the house was simple and practical. The four bawds shared the top two rooms, something they unfailingly grumbled about, as the attic was unbearably hot in summer and cold in winter. Clara allowed them only a small coal allowance. On the second floor were three well-furnished bedrooms which were used only for business. Clara had a private suite on the first floor that she shared with Emily Dawson, the housekeeper, who was also her long-time lover. Across the hall was the parlour, a good-sized room where the men could wait and have a drink of spirits and smoke a pipe if they wanted. However, they were rarely permitted to linger through the entire evening, and Clara was always there to ensure they obeyed. Sophie, the oldest whore, referred to this policy as, "Get up, get in, get on, and get out." The premises were closed at midnight and woe betide any man who presumed otherwise. Drunkenness was frowned upon and those leaving late were expected to be quiet. The Sabbath was always a day of rest.

On the whole, Clara treated the girls well. She let them have short holidays every so often, food was plentiful, and

she performed abortions herself when necessary. She would have been comfortably off by now, except that, with dismaying regularity, she lost her heart to some young doxy and lavished such gifts on her that her savings were seriously jeopardised. This blatant favouritism created havoc in the house, but fortunately the infatuations never lasted long, and the girl disappeared to Montreal or America, where Clara had friends who also ran ill-reputes. Later, the others would hear her sobbing in Emily's arms, begging for forgiveness, promising it would never happen again, and then the house would settle down for a little while.

Every afternoon the girls were invited into Clara's sitting room and Emily served them lemon junkets and cakes as a treat. Here they would sort out petty quarrels, receive their allowances, and discuss their customers. Clara encouraged them to unburden themselves. The information gave her ammunition if she needed it at a later time.

She yawned. The others had been having a lively discussion of their toms, ever a popular topic.

"Personally, I like the fast-trigger ones the best; the grunTERS, no words, next; and the shouters the least. You could go deaf with some of them yelling in your ear," said Nellie, licking the last of the junket off her spoon. "You had one of them Friday, didn't you, Rose? The greenhead. I heard you."

"Ha! That humper wasn't a greenhead. He said he was sixteen, a virgin and the son of a bishop. The closest he's ever been to a bishop is his own cock."

"It's wicked to say things like that," said Sophie. She had been brought up in an orphanage run by the Sisters of St Joseph. Although she had become a prostitute at an early age, she suffered from regular attacks of guilt that sent her scuttling off to confession at St Michael's Cathedral. She was so oblique about her sins, however, that the priest never understood what she was referring to, and she always

got off with a light penance. She compensated by wearing a piece of sacking next to her skin for the next week and refusing her favourite delicacies. Behind her back, the others referred to her variously as Mother-of-God, Saint Sophie, or Jesus-Wept, which she said often.

"He was wild for it," continued Rose. "'Oh, another one, my dear, that was so bad, oh, say that again, I'm coming, I'm coming.' You'd think he was a delivery boy. I was running out of words by the end."

"That's not what it sounded like to me," said Nellie. "I thought you could have gone on for another half hour and not repeated yourself."

Rose scowled. She was notorious for her vulgarity, but she hated the scorn of the other women.

Clara intervened before a squabble could develop. "Now, dears, let's get on. They'll be arriving soon." She picked up a small wooden pail of candies and offered it around. "Everybody take one for now and one for later. They're lovely and fresh; Emily just bought them."

The women started to help themselves.

"I just wanted to reply to Rose," said Mary Ann, her mouth full of the candy. "The one I had, friend of your gull, he was the opposite. He whispered lovely things in my ear the whole time, 'You're so lovely, your eyes are extraordinary.' Never repeated himself and he was spent twice."

"How many times were you?" asked Nellie. The other two snickered. Nobody liked Mary Ann, whose childlike body appealed to a lot of customers. She milked the attraction for all it was worth – wore her hair down, kept her skirts short and flounced, and pouted like a spoiled child.

Mary Ann wasn't offended. She enjoyed stirring up the other whores. "All men are the same. They need to think you are really enjoying yourself, that they are therefore great lovers."

"I think about the taste of the dollars they're going to leave," said Nellie. "I must look happy."

Emily came in. "Hurry up, girls. Time to get dressed. Nellie, don't you have anything cleaner to wear?"

"My other dress isn't dry."

"Well, you've got a stain all over your bodice; it's disgusting. Wear a shawl."

She clapped her hands as if she were shooing away geese. "Come on. We're late tonight."

One by one the girls started to leave. Emily went over to the dresser, pulled open a drawer, and took out a corset.

"You'd better get ready," she said to Clara. "There's a man here. Wants to talk to you."

"Who?"

"Mr. Smith."

"Which Mr. Smith?"

"One of the older ones."

"Damn. Did he say anything else?"

"No. Come on, stand up."

Clara got to her feet and Emily helped her off with her dressing robe. She held the corset so that Clara could step into it and started to tighten the laces.

"Not so tight, Emmie, I can't breathe."

"It's no tighter than usual; you've been eating too many candies."

"You're the one who bought them."

Emily planted a kiss on Clara's shoulder and grinned. "True, I like to see you enjoy them so much. It's like watching my little piggy at her trough."

"Emmie!"

"Don't get frosty. You know how much I love that pig."

She gave Clara's plump buttock an affectionate squeeze. "There you go. All done. What dress do you want to wear?"

"The pearl grey."

Emily came around and looked Clara in the face. "Be careful what you say, dearest. This man smells like trouble to me."

“I know. But we’ve managed this long, I’m not going to let any gull sink me.”

The man calling himself Henry Smith was sitting in the front room. Clara had furnished it according to her idea of a well-to-do family parlour, and it was so crammed with furniture there was barely room to enter. There were two Turkish couches upholstered in purple velour with gold fringes, four Morris chairs, and taking pride of place a so-called courting couch. It was S-shaped and a man sat on one side and a woman the other. The notion was they could converse quite intimately without physical contact. Rose particularly liked this couch as she could whisper lewd things in her customer’s ear and have him squirming in no time. There was a piano in one corner on which Emily stoically played popular songs like “A Beautiful Dreamer” and “Home Sweet Home,” which were always in demand. The piano invariably needed tuning and she added fancy chords that changed the melody, but nobody would dare voice an objection. There were two sideboards on either side of the door, heavy and ornate with burled walnut mouldings. This was where Clara kept the more lascivious tools of her trade. Plush vellum albums of special photographs, books to make a man as randy as a goat. A stereoscope sat on one of the side tables. Just in the unlikely event that a neighbour came to call, the photos on display were innocent: a view of the Nile, a girl on a giant lily pad, children sitting on a wall. In the sideboard were the other pictures. The three-dimensional nature of the stereoscope made these pictures particularly startling. They were twenty-five cents a viewing.

Smith had been a customer of Mrs. Doherty’s for seven years, following her whenever she moved to a new location for safety. Sometimes he visited once or twice a week, sometimes he would stay away for a month or more. There was something in his disdain that made the women

uncomfortable. He wouldn't take liquor, ignored the books and photographs, and was never tempted by the latest special novel. They were glad when Mary Ann took him over.

Nellie was sitting on one of the Morris chairs. She had a bad cold and was hawking copiously into her handkerchief. Clara came out of her room. The man immediately took a gold watch from his waistcoat pocket and consulted it.

"Good evening, Mr. Smith. Sorry to keep you waiting. Nasty weather, isn't it? Can I get you a hot gin in the meantime, warm you up?"

"No, thank you. I'd like to speak to you in private."

"Of course. We can talk in my sitting room."

He followed her to the door, where she paused and looked over her shoulder. "Nellie! If you have to blow out that much snot, can you do it more quietly? The customers are going to vomit."

The girl coughed. "I can't help it. I've got a bad cold."

"Go back to bed then or you'll give it to everybody. It looks like it's going to be quiet tonight anyway."

Gratefully, Nellie got up, pulling down her skirt, which had been hitched to her scrawny thighs. She wasn't wearing any drawers.

The man's face contorted with contempt. "I must admit, the mere sight of female private parts has never aroused me."

"Each to his own," said Clara with a shrug.

She showed him into her sitting room. It, too, was crammed with furniture, and every surface was covered with crochet work, each piece lovingly made by Emily. She'd left the lamps lit and the fire was cheery.

Clara took one of the armchairs close to the hearth and indicated he should take the other.

"Were things satisfactory with Mary Ann?" she asked.

"They were indeed. She was most credible. And adroit. There was a witness we didn't expect. A Chinaman. He'd seen the constable with a young woman. Fortunately, he

couldn't tell the difference between one devil woman and another and swore it was Mary Ann. It made our case even more convincing."

"So I understand. The joke is that Mary Ann knew him. He has been one of our customers."

"Is that so?"

"She is sure he recognised her and decided to help her out."

"I doubt it. He was probably just confused. Nevertheless, this leads precisely to what I wanted to talk about. Mary Ann must go somewhere else. I would like you to send her away. You have places she can go, I know you do. Wait ..."

He held up his hand to stem the protest Clara was about to make.

"I will pay for any inconvenience to you and her."

"She is one of my most popular wenches."

"I realise that, Mrs. Doherty, and in a way I am asking this as a favour. It would be better if she were not available should anyone come looking."

He had not told Clara the reason he'd wanted Mary Ann to appear at the inquest and perjure herself, and she had not asked. She'd long operated on the premise that what a person didn't know couldn't hurt them. Any suspicions she pushed far away from her consciousness. Life was easier that way.

"Well ..." She pretended to think about his offer but she'd already accepted. It was true Mary Ann was popular but she created trouble with the other girls. She'd also had the temerity to laugh when Clara had approached her full of tenderness when she'd first arrived. It was time she visited Montreal.

"As I say, this is going to cost me a lot of money."

"Name a figure."

"I won't be able to get another girl for at least a week, that's thirty dollars lost income right there. Then there's the train fare to Montreal ..."

"I said name a figure. I have no interest in the particulars."

Clara had been about to inflate the expenses but she thought better of it. This man was too fly.

"Forty dollars."

He took out a wallet and counted out the money. "I'd like to see her gone tonight."

"Tonight!"

He added another five-dollar bill. "This will cover your losses. I'll wait and accompany her to the train station myself."

"I don't even know if there is a train tonight."

"There is. She can stay in a hotel until you have a chance to notify her new ... employer."

He stood up. "Thank you for your cooperation, Mrs. Doherty. I'll wait in here while she gets ready."

Clara took up the bills and put them in a porcelain box on the mantel. "It will take at least an hour for her to pack her belongings and to say good-bye."

"Make it half an hour and she and you get another two dollars."

"Very well."

Clara left. She closed the door behind her and rested against it for a moment. Then she spat into the cuspidor that was provided in the hall. Sometimes not even money could sweeten the shit she had to eat.

Chapter Thirty

THE YOUNG MAID ANSWERED Murdoch's second knock. She was wiping her hands on her apron and gaped at him in a flustered way. Her eyes and nose were reddened. He wondered if she had been crying and if this was what happened to her every day. He smiled and touched his hat politely.

"Hello, Janet. I'd like to speak to Mrs. Curran."

"She said she's not at home, sir."

"Did she? I'm afraid I have to insist. It's police business. Would you mind telling her that I'm here? I'll make it right for you."

"Yes, sir."

She scuttled away, leaving him on the threshold, afraid to be so definite as to invite him in. He gave his feet a good wipe on the mat for her sake and stepped into the hall. The far door opened and Augusta emerged, Janet hovering anxiously behind her.

"Mr. Murdoch, we were about to go in to dinner."

Murdoch tried to appear suitably apologetic. The house was quiet, but the way she spoke, you'd think the mayor and council were lined up two by two.

"I insisted on seeing you, Mrs. Curran. Your maid did her job very well." Janet looked so alarmed at his words that he was afraid he'd made things worse for her.

"I'll get back, ma'am," she said.

Augusta fanned her hand dismissively and the girl hurried off.

"What is it you wish, Mr. Murdoch?"

Tonight, she was wearing a black silk dress with grey satin trimming down the bodice and skirt. From what they'd told

him before, he assumed this mourning attire was for her mother. Devotion or defiance?

"There have been further developments in the Wicken case. I wondered if I could talk to Mrs. Nathaniel Eakin?"

"Oh no. She is still ... she is no better."

"Is she able to receive visitors?"

"I believe not. We haven't seen her ourselves yet."

At that moment, a man came into the hall. He was of medium height, stocky, with a thick grey beard that jutted from either side of his chin. He was wearing a burgundy velvet smoking jacket that even from a distance appeared spotted and stained along the lapels. Although there was no physical resemblance whatsoever to Murdoch's own father, he was immediately reminded of him. It was the air that some men acquire when they have undisputed command over their domain.

"Augusta, bring the detective into my study. What are you thinking of?"

He held out his hand to Murdoch. "I'm Nathaniel Eakin. We haven't met before."

"No, you were indisposed when I came last."

"That's what they told you, was it?"

"Father, you were ..."

He interrupted her. "I think you keep me from too many things that go on in this house. I'm as well as the next man."

He didn't seem that way to Murdoch. His face had an unhealthy, shiny flush to it, and his eyes were carrying enough baggage underneath to fit a traveller.

"Come this way, Mr. Murdoch."

The study wasn't large but the walls were panelled in the English style from floor to ceiling. There were glass-fronted bookcases on two sides and in one corner was a closed rolltop desk. All the wood was a dark hue; the chairs were brown leather. However, instead of conveying the snug

respectability of a gentleman's library, the room was gloomy and oppressive. It reeked of cigar smoke.

Eakin followed him in with Augusta close behind.

"Have a seat, Mr. Murdoch," she said.

Murdoch took one of the big armchairs, Eakin the other. Augusta came behind her father and stood with her hand on the back of his chair. Murdoch couldn't quite tell if she was using that as a shield or if she wanted to ensure her father was within reach. Eakin picked up a cigar that was on the table next to him. The ash was long on the end and he scraped it off against the dish. He obviously wasn't concerned about tobacco smoke damaging his books, but Murdoch had the impression they were for show anyway. He waited until the cigar was relit and drawn, the end disappearing into the thicket of Eakin's beard. Murdoch almost coughed. He liked a pipe himself on occasion, but this smoke was vile.

"You were asking after my wife?"

"Yes, I was wondering if I'd be able to talk to her."

"She's in the loony bin."

"I know. Does she have any rationality at all?"

Eakin studied the tip of his cigar. "Depends what you mean. She can form sentences, say words in English. But she's gone mad. Why the hell would you want to talk to her?"

"There are one or two things we want to clear up. We have a new witness who says that on Monday night he heard the sound of a woman crying. He thought it was coming from your house and it was roughly in the same time frame that Constable Wicken died. At the very least, it indicates somebody was awake at that hour and may have seen or heard something."

Nathaniel frowned. "You think it was my wife?"

"Possibly. The witness described the sound as cries for help. When I was here on Tuesday, I saw Mrs. Eakin. She cried out to me for help."

"She did not!" burst out Mrs. Curran.

"She didn't shout out loud, ma'am, but she did speak and what she said was, 'Help me.'"

Nathaniel put down his cigar, took out a large red handkerchief, trumpeted into it, then stuffed it back into his trouser pocket.

"Well, it's true, she moaned often enough."

"You can understand why I'd like to pursue this matter," said Murdoch.

"No, frankly I don't."

"Two reasons. Perhaps Mrs. Eakin saw the constable going by. She could corroborate whether or not he was alone. Secondly, if he did hear these cries, he may have come to investigate ..."

He left the rest of the sentence, not wanting to fill in too much, waiting to see what would be their reaction.

Eakin looked up at his daughter. "Well?"

"Nobody came here."

"Is it possible you wouldn't have heard, ma'am? Your chambers are on the third floor. You didn't hear your stepmother calling out and it does seem that she was."

She thought for a moment and he had the feeling she was searching for the safest answer.

"It is possible but not likely."

Nathaniel poured himself a generous amount of wine from a decanter on the side table and took a good swallow. "I don't see the point of this, sir. Even if the officer did come to this house, which he didn't, what does it matter? It don't overturn the coroner's verdict. The man took his own life and that's all there is to it."

Murdoch decided to change tack. "As I said, there are one or two loose ends to the case. The more I know about Wicken's last movements, the better."

Eakin took another drink of wine as if it were water. "You're wasting your time here."

There was the merest slur to his words. Murdoch knew the signs, and in spite of himself, his body, which had its own wisdom, grew tense.

"I'll be able to determine that myself after I've spoken to Mrs. Eakin personally. And may I ask, what is wrong with her?"

Augusta shifted uncomfortably and involuntarily smoothed the antimacassar that was on the back of the chair. Her father made a show of staring at Murdoch as if he were a likely candidate for a freak show.

"She's been taken up the loop, that's what's wrong. She's gone batchy, barmy."

"Insanity has many faces, doesn't it? My question has more to do with the form that your wife's lunacy has taken."

"I thought you were a police officer, not a physician."

"Father ..." Augusta tried to place a placating hand on Nathaniel's shoulder. He immediately shrugged it off.

"I would imagine Mr. Murdoch wants to know if Stepmother is a danger to herself or anybody else. Isn't that right, sir?"

Murdoch hadn't actually been that clear in his mind as to what he wanted, but he nodded.

"Is she?"

Nathaniel drew deeply on the cigar; the end glowed red through the ash. He didn't reply, his thoughts suddenly pulled away. His daughter answered.

"Unfortunately, Mrs. Eakin suffered a tragic loss not too long ago. Her son by her previous marriage died suddenly of peritonitis. The doctor feels that the grief has caused a temporary derailment of her faculties."

"Derangement. You mean derangement, fool."

Nathaniel had come out of his daydream as vicious as a ferret from its hole. Murdoch smiled falsely. "I can see you've been a schoolteacher, Mr. Eakin."

"No, I have not. But any fool can use words properly if they want to. She's had more education than I ever did. I

never had the opportunity to continue past standard two even if I wanted to. I had to work. The family needed my wages."

Mrs. Curran attempted a feeble retaliation. "I hardly think he needs to know our personal history, Father." Her fair skin flushed with humiliation but she continued to address Murdoch.

"She began to suffer from delusions of persecution. She became convinced the child was poisoned and that she herself was in danger."

"Speak to the physician if you don't believe us," said Nathaniel. "He wrote the death certificate. Boy died from a burst appendix. Nothing could be done." He gulped down the last of the wine. Then he leaned forward toward Murdoch, fixing him with eyes that were fast becoming bloodshot. "The thing is, Margaret knows this lot is against her and she mulled that over in her mind until she went batchy."

His daughter fluttered nervously. "Nobody is 'against her,' as you put it, Father. I, in particular, have tried to be welcoming. She would have none of it. She was so hostile from the very beginning."

"She was afraid. Stands to reason she would be. Here I was, a widower. Children grown. My daughter here is used to running the house. You know what women are like when another hen comes into the barnyard." He made pecking motions with his fingers. "*Cluck, cluck, cluck* . Fact is, they're all afraid she's going to get one under her apron and claim their inheritance."

Murdoch was beginning to feel sorry for Mrs. Curran. She turned her face away and moved over to the hearth. There were neither mourning crepe nor festoons of black ribbon in this room, Murdoch noticed.

"What was the name of the doctor who attended your wife?"

In spite of what he'd said, he wasn't at all sure this inquiry was going to yield anything, but Eakin was such a vile-tempered old sod, he didn't want to let him off too easily. Nathaniel didn't reply but began to puff on his cigar again. Murdoch knew the procrastination was a further attempt to intimidate him, to put him in his place, and he could feel his own temper rising. This man might have money and fancy himself a gentleman, but he had the temperament of a pugilist, and if he wasn't careful, he, Murdoch, would take up the challenge, old man or not.

Augusta answered for him. "Dr. Ferrier. He lives just across the road. Number three hundred and twelve."

Murdoch took out his notebook and wrote down the name and number.

A gong started to mark out the hour and he saw that there was another clock on one of the shelves that was identical to the one in the parlour. The coins around her bosom gleamed in the firelight.

He folded up his notebook, returned it to his pocket, and stood up.

"Are you going out to the loony bin?" asked Eakin.

"Yes, I'll go tomorrow."

Nathaniel got to his feet and came over to him. He was a good head shorter than Murdoch, which meant he had to look up and Murdoch could smell the cigar and the wine on his breath.

"What they should tell you is that my wife suffers from erotomania. Do you know what that means?"

"No, I don't."

"Well, you should write it down in your little notebook. It means as soon as she sees a pair of trousers, she's going to lift her tail for you. She went for Jarius in the same way. And my son-in-law, her husband ..." He jerked his thumb in Augusta's direction. "I wouldn't recommend you take her up on the offer. She'd do it for the butcher's boy if he came by."

"I'll take that under advisement," said Murdoch.

“Yes, I would if I were you.”

Sullenly, he backed off. With a nod to Mrs. Curran, Murdoch left.

Chapter Thirty-One

MURDOCH JOGTROTTED ALL THE WAY to Ontario Street in an attempt to dispel his anger. His head was filled with fantasies, all of them violent, of what he would do to Nathaniel Eakin. When he'd finished smashing the man's head against the floor for the second time, he slowed himself down. Yes, the old geezer was a horse's arse but Murdoch knew the rage he'd stirred up didn't totally belong with him. His memory of his father shouting about his mother was a tight pain in his chest and he felt short of breath. "She's a whore, a tart, cheap as a dish clout." And more, words that he didn't want to recall. She, silent as always, going about her task, head bowed in a way that made him, the boy, want to scream out, "Look up! Don't lower your head like that." But when he spoke to her afterwards, she wept, and his feelings of fear and pity became overlaid with contempt for her and a burning rage toward his father that even now made him hot. According to the local magistrate, his mother had died accidentally, while she was gathering shellfish on the beach. A slip, a hard knock on the head that rendered her unconscious, and she drowned. Murdoch had gone to the shore afterwards, trying to find the pool where she'd died. He couldn't place it exactly but it didn't matter, they were all shallow, no more than splashing deep. That made her death even more meaningless.

"Evening, Mr. Murdoch." His next-door neighbour, O'Brien, was going by. He had a sailor's duffel bag slung over his shoulder and Murdoch assumed he was off once again to some exotic place. He turned and waved in the direction of his house and Murdoch could see his wife and children were crowded into the window. They all waved back with varying

degrees of enthusiasm. Murdoch thought O'Brien had probably once again impregnated Mrs. O'Brien and they could expect to see child number nine.

All the little faces were watching Murdoch now and he tried to give them a cheery smile. He resolved to pick up some more barley sugar sticks from Mrs. Bail's confectionery as soon as he could.

He let himself into the house and was greeted by the sight of his landlady and landlord.

Arthur was walking slowly down the hall, Beatrice close behind as if ready to catch him. They both turned around to welcome him.

"Evening, Will," said Arthur.

"What are you doing out here?"

"Taking in the sights. I'm getting corns on my rear end from sitting so much. I thought I'd take a stroll. I'm pretending this is King Street. Any minute now I'm going to go in one of the fancy shops and spend a lot of money."

"Good thing you've come, Mr. Murdoch," said Beatrice. "He always overdoes it and he won't listen to me. We've done quite enough for one night."

Arthur had dressed himself in trousers and a flannel shirt for the occasion. In the candlelight, with a brighter energy in his face, he looked almost healthy. Murdoch felt a rush of affection for him and would have embraced him if he hadn't known it would embarrass everybody. He tapped his foot on the floor. They had rolled up the hall rug to make walking a bit easier.

"This is perfect for doing a schottische. Mrs. K., we can practise whenever you're ready."

"I've forgotten how. Here, let me take your things," said Mrs. Kitchen, abandoning her husband. "It's been so miserable all day. I've got your dinner warming."

"Thank you. As usual, I'm famished. Will you join me, Arthur?"

“Why don’t you eat first. I’ll have a rest to satisfy my wife and then we can have tea.”

“You can go right into the parlour,” said Beatrice. “I’ll just see to Father.”

“No, you won’t,” said Arthur and he flexed his arm to make a muscle. “I am strong as the Borneo Wild Man. I will go myself and sit in my chair until called.”

He was speaking jokingly but his frustration was evident. Before he became ill, Arthur Kitchen had been highly active, a keen bicyclist and walker. According to his wife, he was an excellent dancer, specialty the polka, something Murdoch was still aspiring to.

Beatrice went on down to the kitchen and Arthur into the middle room. Murdoch stood for a moment, blowing on his cold hands, but really trying to listen for sounds from upstairs – the typewriting machine, or Enid talking to her son. He was just about to go into the parlour when he heard the stairs creak. Mrs. Jones herself came down the stairs. She was holding her son’s hand and they were both dressed for the outdoors in long rubber waterproof coats. There was something in her expression that he couldn’t quite read. Guarded, not altogether happy to see him. He felt a rush of disappointment. Back to that again, were they?

“Mrs. Jones, Alwyn. Where are you off to on such a dreary night?”

“There is a special meeting at the church. A speaker has come up from Wisconsin. He is just returned from our mission in Nigeria. Apparently, he is most inspirational.” Her voice was full of enthusiasm and Murdoch felt jealous. It made him sharp.

“I sincerely hope he is worth braving the rain.”

She was aware of his tone and her face clouded. “He will be, I am sure. He has worked for Our Lord for many years.”

Murdoch stepped back so she could pass him. He tapped the boy playfully on his cap but the child shrank away as if he had dealt him a blow. That irritated Murdoch as well. The

boy was a mardy tit most of the time. At the door, Enid hesitated and turned back to him.

"I really don't expect us to be late, Mr. Murdoch. Perhaps you and I could have a word together if you're still up?"

"For that I'll wait till midnight."

He'd meant to be gallant but the words came out angry.

"Good evening, then."

She opened the door, letting in a surge of cold, wet air. Murdoch went into the front room, chastising himself for being such a boor. Mrs. Jones seemed highly devout to him. Not likely to change her religion. He caught himself. If it came to that, what about him? Could he denounce his faith, which is what he supposed he would have to do if ... Again he stopped. Look at him, racing ahead of himself like a fanciful girl. Marriage on his mind and they didn't even use each other's first names! He went over to the table and sat down at the place set for him. Does any of it really matter? Our Lord didn't declare himself a Baptist or a Catholic for that matter. He'd started out his life as a Jew. Who was he anyway? Murdoch had asked that question once when he was being taught his catechism. The priest had slapped him with the holy book on the side of the head. "Those sorts of heathen questions sound too close to blasphemy, young man. Go kneel down in that corner and say your Paternosters until I tell you to move."

Murdoch had stayed there until his knees screamed with pain but he had not begged for release.

He rubbed at his face hard. This seemed to be his day for chewing over old grudges. Father O'Malley was one. A big, tough priest, he had both a brogue and brain as thick as an Irish bog.

Murdoch knew his mother would have liked to have seen him enter the priesthood, but he couldn't imagine it. However, his sister Susanna had gone into a convent school and took her final vows at the age of eighteen. She lived as a cloistered nun in a convent in Montreal and he hadn't seen

her for a long time. He was allowed to write and received one letter a year. Hers was impersonal, full of devout phrases. The playmate he had loved, argued with, and ultimately protected had vanished behind a veil of platitudes.

“My, you are looking very fierce, Mr. Murdoch.”

Mrs. Kitchen came in carrying a tray.

He grinned at her, glad to be brought out of his thoughts. “You’re right. I was thinking about the Church.”

She gave him a shrewd glance. “The Church or people in the Church?”

He helped unload the dinner plate. Tonight she had cooked his favourite dish, sausages and mashed potato and baked rutabaga.

“Your sweet is an egg custard. Mrs. Jones made it. She insisted. She said your gum was probably still sore. Arthur even tried some. Very tasty too.”

“Can I start with that?”

“Don’t you dare.” She smiled at him. “I find Mrs. Jones is a woman who grows on me. Quiet. I thought she was standoffish at first but she’s just reserved. Wouldn’t you agree, Mr. Murdoch?”

“I do indeed.”

“I particularly like the fact that she teaches her boy proper manners. She won’t take any nonsense.”

Murdoch nodded noncommittally.

“She’s a good mother, I’d say. Not one of these flighty women who’d stuff their children into whatever purse suits them.”

He looked at her but she wasn’t giving anything away.

She removed the tray to the sideboard. “I’ll leave you in peace then. Ring when you’re done.”

When she’d closed the door, Murdoch slowed down on the gusto with which he’d approached his meal. The potatoes were cold and lumpy, the rutabaga bitter, and the sausage had turned hard as a rock. But he didn’t live here on

account of the food and he would never want Mrs. Kitchen to know what a dreadful cook she was.

He must have been asleep for more than an hour. The last he remembered was sitting in the armchair by the fire and putting his head back. He had the hazy impression of Beatrice covering him with a quilt, but he couldn't let go of the sleep that was pulling him down. What finally woke him was the sound of the front door opening. He sat up, groggy, trying to grab awareness. The candle had burned low in the holder and the fire was down to embers. The clock showed eleven.

He heard footsteps on the stairs and, yawning, he got up and went into the hall. Enid Jones was struggling to negotiate the hall furniture. She was carrying Alwyn, who was fast asleep.

"Here, let me." He held out his arms for the boy. At first he thought she was going to refuse but her only other choice was to put Alwyn down.

"Thank you."

Awkwardly, she passed him over, heavy with the relaxation of sleep. His head dropped against Murdoch's shoulder and he tucked him in under his chin.

"I'll hold the door," said Enid, and she whisked up the stairs ahead of him.

At the entrance to her room, he paused for her to light a lamp and pull back the coverlet from the bed. How warm and solid the boy felt in his arms, his breathing deep and regular. Murdoch gently kissed his cheek, still cool from the outdoors.

"Let me take off his waterproof." She manoeuvred the boy's arms out of the sleeves while Murdoch held him up. She was so close, he could see the shape of her mouth, a faint down on her upper lip.

"Lay him here, if you please."

He did so and Alwyn immediately rolled onto his stomach, knee bent.

"I'll have to take off his boots, but I don't have the heart to disturb him now. I'll wait."

"Surely you didn't carry him all the way from Jarvis Street?" asked Murdoch in a whisper.

"No, just from the top of the street, but by the time we got here, he felt heavier than a sack of potatoes. I would never have managed the stairs. Thank you so much, Mr. Murdoch."

"Not at all. It was my pleasure." And he meant it.

She hesitated. "I was hoping we could talk for a few moments. If you're not too tired, that is."

"I'm wide awake. We can go down to the parlour if you like. I don't hear anything from the Kitchens so I'm assuming they are asleep."

"I am much later than I expected."

"The speaker had a lot to say then?"

"Yes. He was quite wonderful and people had many questions for him."

She took off her waterproof, unpinned her hat, put it on the dresser, and quickly smoothed back her hair.

"Shall we go downstairs?"

Nathaniel could not understand why Jarius was not answering him. He had told him twice that he wanted to get up. He had vomited on his bed, on the pillow, and the sour smell was in his nostrils. He wanted to move his face away but he couldn't. He tried to talk again but the words he heard coming out were garbled, not what he wanted to say. He could see Jarius frown uncomprehendingly. *My arm has gone to sleep, help me roll over on my back*. Somebody must have put the rug over him because he could feel the weight. It was far too heavy. He was cold though, the fire must have gone out. Had he tripped when he was going to put on another piece of coal? He wanted to turn his head to

see but no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't. He could hear somebody talking gibberish. *What idiot is that?* he wondered.

"Father? Father?" Jarius was kneeling beside him, and he slipped an arm under Nathaniel's shoulders to hoist him into a sitting position. Nathaniel made an anguished effort to tell him what was happening but all that came out were grunts.

"Augusta!" yelled Jarius. "Augusta, come here quick!"

Chapter Thirty-Two

MURDOCH HEARD FOOTSTEPS coming down the corridor toward the cell. The heavy tread could belong only to Constable Crabtree. The tiny panel in the cell door was pushed aside and he could see the constable's eyes peering in. They looked amused.

"You can come in, George, I'm awake."

Crabtree entered. He was carrying a mug of something, presumably tea.

"Thought you'd like this, sir."

Murdoch scratched his leg under his trouser leg. "Who was in here last?"

"Old Joe Baxter, I think."

"He left a lot behind."

He took the mug and drank some of the tea. It was strong and tasted as if a cup of sugar had been dumped into it. It was also scalding hot and he winced.

"Did you get any sleep at all, sir?"

"No. But at least it made me more sympathetic toward our guests. I'm going to requisition a new pallet. Some rocks have wandered into this one."

He yawned and looked around the small cell. There was a narrow bed, which had a straw mattress and an iron-hard blanket, a stool, and a bucket "What do you say to a couple of pictures on the walls, George? Tasteful. I'll donate my portrait of Colonel Grasett. Cheer the place up a bit."

"The prisoners might want to stay on if we do that."

Murdoch scratched again. "Highly unlikely, even with decorations."

He twisted his head, trying to get the kink out of his neck. "I'd better get out of here before the others start wondering

what the hell I'm doing."

"You're not the first officer to doss down in one of the cells and you probably won't be the last."

"I should have gone to the Avonmore but this was the first place I thought of."

Crabtree nodded. Ever tactful, he hadn't yet inquired why Murdoch had come to the station in the middle of the night looking for a bed to sleep in.

"George, how did you and Ellen meet each other?"

If the constable was surprised by the question, he didn't show it. "We've known each other since we were kids. Our parents were good friends. We played in each other's back yards."

"So, when did you know you were in love with each other?"

"In love? I can't say exactly. We just sort of took it for granted that we would get married."

"And you're both Methodists, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you believe in mixed marriages, George?"

"You mean if the parties are of different religions?"

"Yes. What if one was, say, Roman Catholic, and the other was, say, Baptist? Do you think such a marriage would work?"

"That would depend, wouldn't it?"

"On what?" Murdoch almost shouted out the question.

"I suppose on how important religion was to each person and how much they were prepared to compromise."

Murdoch groaned. He felt as if he'd been drinking for two days, with his thick tongue and head. Enid and he had gone downstairs to the parlour but he knew, he could tell, he was not going to like what she had to say. And he hadn't.

"I've been thinking and thinking, and difficult as it is for me to come to my conclusion, I have done so."

"Yes?" His heart sinking.

"You would want me to convert to Catholicism and I could not do that. I would be disloyal to my husband's memory and the solemn promise I made to him to rear Alwyn with Jesus as his Saviour. Therefore, I'm leaving. I've found another boarding house closer to the church."

"And further away from St Paul's, I suppose?"

He had to admire her – she'd shown more honesty than he had. Then, for the first time, she called him by his Christian name and the sweetness of it was almost obliterated by the hurt of what she was saying.

"Will, I must admit, I am growing very fond of you, but for both our sakes, it is better that these feelings do not continue."

Murdoch fingered his bristly jaw. He needed a shave.

"I have been turned down, George."

"By Mrs. Jones, sir? The Welsh lady?"

"That's the one. She doesn't think she can overcome the obstacle of our different religions. She also said, and I quote, 'We have both suffered loss of a loved one. It is lonely we are. We must not mistake these feelings for real love. They may have been created by mere proximity.' As if it would have happened with any man."

Crabtree cleared his throat. "Forgive me, Mr. Murdoch, but she does have a point. Perhaps when she is living somewhere else, you can determine if you have found true love or not."

Murdoch had to laugh at the solemnity with which his constable delivered this speech. "You're in the wrong line of work, George. You should have been a minister."

"I did consider that at one time, sir. But Ellen didn't fancy being a minister's wife. Too much scrutiny on you. I am assuming, by the way, sir, that you do intend to see Mrs. Jones when she is not under the same roof?"

"I don't know. I hadn't got that far."

They heard steps outside and one of the young constables came to the door.

"There's somebody here to see you, Mr. Murdoch. A Scotch lassie."

"Who?"

"The boy with the braid down his back."

"The Chinaman's son?"

"That's the one."

"Did he say what he wanted?"

"Och, no." He gave a dreadful imitation of Foon Lee's accent.

"Give me a few minutes, then bring him down to my office."

"Yes, sir." He looked around the cell curiously. "Are you doing an inspection, Mr. Murdoch?"

"Something like that."

He stood up and felt a sharp twinge in his lower back. "George, remind me from time to time, will you, that I am a grown man and I do not have to behave like a child in a temper."

He'd yelled out at her, "If you consider I am too proximate, as you put it, I will go somewhere else."

Crabtree grinned. "Why don't I see if I can dig out a razor for you? Nothing like scraping at your face to make you realise you've grown up."

Lifting the strands of reeds, Crabtree ushered Foon Lee into the cubicle. The young man bowed. Murdoch didn't quite know how to respond but he sort of bobbed his head.

"Have a seat, Mr. Lee."

Foon took the chair in front of the desk and immediately put his hands in the wide sleeves of his tunic. He was in his working clothes today, blue linen tunic and black wide trousers. Murdoch thought he seemed ill at ease, and was trying hard not to show it. Probably it was the first time he had ever been inside a police station. Murdoch suddenly had the sense of how it might look to the young Chinaman.

Strange people, strange ways. He smiled, trying to put him at ease, then got self-conscious. Perhaps in China it wasn't considered good manners to smile.

"You wanted to talk to me, Mr. Lee?"

The young man nodded or bowed, Murdoch couldn't tell which it was. Maybe both.

There was an uncomfortable silence while they both looked at each other; Murdoch tried to appear encouraging.

"I have come concerning the matter of the constable who recently met with his death. On later reflection, my father has decided he is not utterly positive in his identification of the young woman accompanying the constable on that fateful night. In fact, on later reflection he has determined that the woman you, yourself, presented was more likely to be the one he had first seen standing behind the officer." He paused to await Murdoch's response, who, sensing there was more to come, didn't say anything. Foon looked away and addressed the rest of his remarks to the wall behind Murdoch's shoulder. "In the interests of helping the police officers in their quest, my father is, however, able to offer some information concerning the other woman. The ladyship who appeared at the inquest and said she was betrothed to Mr. Wicken."

"Is he now? And what might that information consist of?"

"Her name is Mary Ann Trowbridge as she stated but her address is a deceit. She does in fact live on Sydenham Street. Her profession is of ill-repute."

"I see. How does your father come to have that information?"

Foon coughed politely but still spoke to Her Majesty's portrait. "This ladyship and my father had acquaintance at a previous time. Of an entirely chaste nature, of course."

It wasn't easy to read him through the thick dialect and the apparent lack of expression on his face, but there was a hint of resentment in his tone, a tightening of his lips.

"When was this chaste encounter?"

"A few months ago, I believe."

"Did he mention at what number on Sydenham Miss Trowbridge lives?"

"Yes. She resides at number three hundred and thirty-four. The house with a blue door."

Murdoch fiddled with his moustache. Foon was corroborating what Beulah had said. Apparently Miss Mary Ann was still active. It might make matters even harder for Mrs. Wicken and Isobel if this came out.

The Chinaman finally met his eyes. "Mr. Murdoch, would it be correct for my part to assume you will not need to mention my father? We are at the mercy ..." His voice trailed off and Murdoch realised what a serious thing it was for him to come to the station.

"Does he know you have brought this information to me?"

Foon looked at him and his expression this time was revealing. "Can I say that my father would no doubt have approved, but I have not yet had the occasion to inform him. I chose to encumber myself with this errand."

Murdoch held out his hand. "Thank you, Mr. Lee. You have performed your civic duty. I will follow up on this."

Foon shook hands somewhat hesitantly. His fingers were cool, slightly damp.

Chapter Thirty-Three

ALL THE CURTAINS WERE DRAWN at the house with the blue door. A cast-iron lantern was fastened on a bracket to the side of the porch. It was placed so that no direct light fell on the person who might be standing there. Cunning. Murdoch opened the gate, which screeched a warning, and walked up to the door. There was a heavy brass knocker he thought at first was carved in the shape of a lion's head. As he lifted the ring, however, he saw that the design was that of a woman's face with snakes writhing from her brow. He thumped hard.

Almost at once, the curtain across the windows to his right lifted slightly. He couldn't see who was looking out but he smiled pleasantly so as not to frighten them. After what seemed a long wait, the door opened, barely a crack, only sufficient for him to glimpse a tiny woman, soberly dressed and sharp featured.

"Yes?" She scowled at him.

He touched the brim of his hat politely. "I was wondering if I could speak to Miss Mary Ann Trowbridge. I understand she lives here."

"Who are you?"

Murdoch hesitated, not sure whether revealing his identity at this point would get the door closed in his face. He felt squeamish at the idea of pretending to be a customer, however.

"My name is Murdoch. I'm an acting detective at number four station. I'm pursuing an investigation and I would like to talk to Miss Trowbridge."

She didn't look impressed or alarmed. "What sort of investigation?"

"I'd prefer to discuss that with her." "She doesn't live here anymore." She didn't relent from the frown.

"Where is she?"

"I don't know. I'm not the post office keeper."

The woman's hair was pulled up tightly into a knot at the top of her head, accentuating her rather prominent ears. What he could see of her dress was a drab brown. She made him think of an elf, but without the endearing qualities one usually associated with the fairy world. She also was a kindred spirit to Beulah.

"Is there anyone else I can speak to then?"

"No."

Fortunately, he was saved from more aggravation by somebody speaking from the hallway.

"Emily, you are letting in the worst draft. Either invite the gentleman in or close the door."

The woman addressed was obviously about to follow the second injunction but Murdoch quickly got his knee in the way. He pushed his way forward across the threshold.

A young woman was standing at the bottom of the stairs. She was full fleshed and her white diaphanous gown was cut to reveal a considerable amount of bosom and bare arm. Her abundant brown hair was loosely pinned, her lips and cheeks rouged. She was Murdoch's idea of a whore.

She smiled. If the doorkeeper was a bad-tempered elf, this young woman was a flower fairy. At least in the dim light. He touched his hat again.

"Excuse me, ma'am, for disturbing you, but I am a detective and I would like to come in and ask a few questions."

The smile vanished and she looked alarmed.

"I, er ..." She glanced over her shoulder for help and yet another woman appeared. The hall was becoming crowded. She was older, statuesque in build, magnificently corseted into a pearl-grey silk gown. The ivory satin draping her bosom would have done credit to any mantelpiece. Her full

chin was pushed into further roundness by the high lace collar. Exactly what he imagined a bawdy house mistress would look like.

"Emily, what is the trouble here?" She spoke with complete authority and the gatekeeper stepped back a pace. The young woman also moved halfway up the stairs but stayed to watch.

Again Murdoch introduced himself. "I would appreciate some of your time, ma'am."

He saw her consider all of her choices, then she smiled. Her teeth were startlingly white, and faultless. He was reminded of Dr. Stevens's denture display case. She held out a mittened hand, leaning across Emily as if she were a piece of furniture.

"How do you do? I'm Mrs. Clara Doherty."

He took her hand, a little uncertain as to what was expected of him. She was wearing a large emerald ring on her index finger and the gesture was almost papal. He refrained from kissing it, however, and half-squeezed, half-shook the palm.

"Please come in. We can talk in my chambers." Her accent was quite English.

He wasn't sure how he was going to get past the recalcitrant servant without embarrassment to both of them, but Mrs. Doherty saved him.

"Emily, I'm sure Mr. Murdoch needs something warm. Bring us some Turkish coffee. Is that agreeable to you, sir?"

Murdoch nodded appreciatively. His search for Mary Ann Trowbridge was introducing him to some exotic culinary tastes.

"Give me your things," said the housekeeper and he obeyed, struggling in the confined space to divest himself of his sealskin coat. Finally he was free and she took the coat and hat and trotted off down the hall, where she dumped them on a tall oaken stand. The young woman, who had giggled prettily during this transaction, was still watching,

but with a quick nod of the head from her mistress, she too left, ascending the stairs with a certain degree of melodrama and her dress lifted well above ankle height. The effect was marred, however, by her need to sneeze violently. She didn't let go of her skirt but sniffed back whatever snot she could.

"Mr. Murdoch?" Mrs. Doherty said.

He blushed, annoyed at himself for being distracted.

"This way." She pulled aside a red velvet portiere to the left, opened the door, and ushered him in. He immediately banged his shin against the corner of a low table that seemed to be placed directly in the doorway. Mrs. Doherty sailed ahead, navigating an astounding amount of furniture – lamp tables, plant stands laden with large potted ferns, purple plush armchairs. She took a seat on one of the couches by the fireplace and indicated he should sit across from her. The carpet was thick, fawn coloured, patterned with large pink and yellow roses. Mrs. Doherty glanced at his feet and he was aware that his boots were wet and he shifted like a schoolboy. He'd conducted many interviews in his career but he didn't remember feeling so ill-at-ease and clumsy. He didn't know if it was his own consciousness of his lack of sexual initiation or if Mrs. Doherty had perfected the art of keeping the male half of the population off balance.

"I know that Mary Ann Trowbridge lives here. I would like to talk to her."

His harsh tone apparently startled Clara, who had obviously been intent on keeping up pretences as long as she could. She frowned.

"I'm afraid she's moved out."

"When?"

"Yesterday, as a matter of fact. But I must insist you explain yourself, sir. Why do you want to speak to her?"

Her voice changed; the false English intonation dropped away.

“As you no doubt are aware, Miss Trowbridge testified recently at an inquest into the death of a young constable. The investigation is not complete and I would very much like to ask her some questions.”

She chose to look affronted at his lack of manners.

They were interrupted by Emily, who without a knock or any other warning opened the door and entered the room. She was carrying a silver tray on which sat a silver coffeepot and two cups and saucers. They were delicate but normal size, unlike the ones at the Avison house.

“I’ve just took out some plum cake, shall I bring it in?” she asked Clara.

“No, this is quite adequate.”

Murdoch would have dearly liked some plum cake, as his stomach had been growling for the last hour, but he had offended Clara by his lack of tact and she was punishing him. There was a stiff silence while Emily put down the tray on the sideboard, shoving aside a porcelain lamp that tinkled musically as the crystal droplets shook. She poured out some dark, thick liquid into the china cups and handed one to Clara, the other to Murdoch. Then she herself took a seat on the couch beside Mrs. Doherty, who immediately sipped avidly at her drink. Murdoch tried his. The brew smelled all right, but tasted so harsh and bitter he almost spat it out. He was aware Clara was watching him.

“Hm ... hm.”

Surprisingly she smiled her perfect smile. “I prepare the essence myself. I have heard there is none quite like it.”

Murdoch nodded in acknowledgment, not sure how he was going to swallow the rest of the poisonous brew. He felt as if he had lost a layer of skin off his tongue.

“Horrible stuff,” said Emily. “Burn a hole in your stomach.”

Mrs. Doherty ignored her and he wondered again what the status of the bad-tempered elf was in this household. Not servant surely. She took too many liberties.

His hostess opened a drawer in one of the plant stands that was on her right. She took out a small silver flask, unscrewed the top, and held it out to him. "A little brandy, Mr. Murdoch. It is a very dull morning."

He wouldn't have broken the fragile truce even if he'd taken the pledge.

"Thank you, ma'am. A spot would go down well."

Emily snatched the flask from Clara's hand and poured a generous shot into his cup. She then added a much smaller amount to Mrs. Doherty's cup. Murdoch tasted the coffee again. The brandy definitely improved the flavour and he managed to gulp back most of it.

He heard the faint sound of a bell ringing from the rear of the house. Emily immediately stood up. "I'll leave you to your business," she said, and she gathered up the two cups, put them on the tea tray, and left. As soon as the door had closed, Mrs. Doherty bent over, fished beneath the skirt of the couch, and pulled out a wooden pail. She took off the lid.

"Would you care for a sweet?"

"No, thank you, ma'am."

She paused, scrutinised the contents of the pail, and selected a bright pink egg-shaped candy.

"Now, sir. You were saying?" asked Clara. The English inflection was back in place, slightly muffled by the crackling of her chewing. He decided to come in on a more oblique tack.

"Are you acquainted with Mr. Sam Lee, a Chinaman?"

She didn't speak until she'd finished off the candy egg. "No, I am not."

"He says he has been a visitor here."

"Is that so? Unfortunately, Mr. Murdoch, as all of my friends will tell you, I have a most appalling memory. In my capacity of music teacher, I see many people but I could not tell you who they are. If we were ever to meet on the street, I do not acknowledge them. I regret to say, I will probably forget you, yourself, tomorrow."

So that was going to be her line, was it?

"But you do remember Oliver Wicken? He was engaged to Miss Trowbridge."

"How extraordinary. But these days young women are so independent. They don't share their lives at all, not the way we used to when I was a girl."

Murdoch was certain she had never been young, that she had sprung fully dressed and bejewelled out of her father's head.

"You are saying he never came here to see her?"

"No, he did not."

"What is your relation to Miss Trowbridge?"

"She is my niece by marriage."

He leaned forward, trying to force her to look him in the eyes.

"Mrs. Doherty, at the inquest which is under the jurisdiction of Her Majesty, Queen Victoria, Miss Trowbridge produced a letter supposedly from her aunt. She named her as a Mrs. Avison. That good lady has informed me that they are not related and that, in fact, Miss Trowbridge was her maid some years ago. Her name then was Trotter. It seems that the poor girl was got in the family way and was dismissed."

"How unkind of her employer."

"Madam, I must remind you we are dealing with the law. This is very serious. It seems that your niece produced a document which was a forgery. She will be open to charges."

"I understand that."

Frustrated, Murdoch stood up, although there wasn't very far to move.

"You are saying, unequivocally, that you have no knowledge of a constable named Oliver Wicken or any engagement that existed between him and Miss Mary Ann Trowbridge?"

She shrugged and delicately probed underneath her dentures to remove a fragment of icing. "I am saying that, with such a bad memory as I have, I am utterly unreliable as any sort of witness."

He knew he would not shake her. Even in such ridiculous lies she was imposing.

"Why did Miss Trowbridge leave your house?"

Again the shrug. "She was a little bored with Toronto. She has relatives in Montreal and it seemed more exciting to her, I presume. She rarely confided in me."

He returned to the couch, sat down, and took out his notebook.

"Where is she staying in Montreal?"

"Alas, Mr. Murdoch, I don't know. She never said."

He closed the notebook with a snap. "Was Miss Trowbridge at home on Monday evening?"

"Yes, I believe she was."

"All evening?"

He'd made a move she hadn't expected. She bought time by sifting through the candy pail.

"I cannot say for certain. I was rather unwell; I retired early."

A yellow egg was popped into her mouth. More crunching.

"Did you say good night to your niece?"

"Yes, of course."

"What time was that?"

"I cannot be precise."

"Just within an hour would help. Eight o'clock? Nine?"

She hesitated, trying to sort out the least compromising answer. "Perhaps closer to nine. As I say, she is an independent young woman. She must have slipped out, not wanting me to worry."

"Would you have forbidden her if you had known?"

"Of course. Which is why she was probably so cautious. I doubt anyone else would have seen her."

"In other words, nobody will deny or corroborate her statement?"

"I suppose you could put it that way."

She offered him the candy pail.

"Can I tempt you?"

"No, thank you." He waited for her attention. "Miss Trowbridge said under oath that she met with Wicken the night he died."

"Indeed!"

"But I have a witness who says he saw the constable in the company of a different woman at that exact time. His fiancée."

"Really? Another? Is he setting up to be a bigamist?"

"I don't think so. I believe he had only one, the young woman who met him on his beat. You see, according to my witness, Miss Trowbridge is a prostitute."

He'd wanted to shock her but she was ready.

"There are always people ready to smear a young woman's reputation."

"And yours then, ma'am. My witness says that you run a bawdy house here and that Mary Ann Trowbridge is one of your doxies."

She smiled; she was on safe ground here. She'd dealt with this before. "As I already said, I am a music teacher. I run a music academy for adult students. People are only too ready to gossip."

As if to validate her statement, a piano started up from somewhere in the house. The sound was execrable, out of tune and spasmodic.

She was as implacable as the stuffed couch she sat on. Murdoch sat forward.

"Mrs. Doherty. At this time I am not too interested in how you earn your living. I am more concerned with trying to find the truth about what happened to Oliver Wicken. Let me put it this way. I will give you until tomorrow evening to locate the current whereabouts of Miss Mary Ann Trowbridge. If I

receive that information in good time, I will not proceed any further with the complaint we are going to receive about you and the music academy. Is that clear?"

For answer, she reached over and pulled at a bell rope that hung beside the fireplace.

"I will ask Emily to see you out."

He didn't move and they faced each other like two opponents across a chess board. She lowered her gaze first. "I'll think about what you have said, Mr. Murdoch. If I do obtain the information you need, I will send a messenger to the station."

"Number four, the northwest corner of Parliament Street and Wilton."

The door opened and the housekeeper came in carrying his sealskin coat and hat. He took them from her and headed for the door, negotiating his way around the chairs. Mrs. Doherty and Emily both watched him.

There was a lamp beside Nathaniel's bed, the wick turned low. The old man's face was dark with shadows, but there was a glisten of saliva dribbling from the corner of his mouth. His eyes were open. Jarius leaned over the bed, placing his hands on either side of Nathaniel's head as if he would embrace him. He stared into the unmoving eyes.

"I don't know if you can hear me or understand what I am saying but I don't care. Listen to this, Nathaniel. It is time you died. You should have gone years ago. You won't recover from this, don't even hope that you will. So it is time to make right some wrongs. You are going to make a new will."

The old man made grunting sounds in his throat and his eyelids flickered.

"Does that little fart mean you understand me? I dearly hope so. I want you to make your last journey knowing the truth. You can take it to hell with you because that is surely

where you are going.” Jarius picked up the cloth that was on the pillow and wiped away the dribble. Then he bent down until he was so close, it was almost a kiss.

“I hate you! You think I loved you but you fooled yourself. I have never for one moment felt any feelings toward you other than disgust. You destroyed my mother, my dear mother, as surely as if you had put a revolver to her temple. She wanted to die because her life here was unbearable.”

He caught Nathaniel by the chin and jerked his head higher.

“You do understand. I can see that you do. You look shocked. I don’t know why you should be. We reap what we sow. You are fond of proverbs, aren’t you? *Spare the rod and spoil the child. Waste not, want not*. Lots of them, all impressed on my bare backside.”

Nathaniel made a feeble attempt to move his head away but it was impossible. Gibb squeezed his chin even tighter. “Frank hates you too, but you probably know that. The surprise must be me.”

He let go and stepped back, pulling aside the quilt. “You stupid, revolting old man. At your age, to think you could still stop your beak in some poor woman.” With a tug, he lifted the nightshirt. “Look at you. A chicken gizzard has more life in it than that.” He leaned over him again. “Listen to me good, Nathaniel. Your little jade was as light heeled as they come. She wanted to hump with me from the moment she came in the house. And she did. She slipped between my sheets many a night when you were snoring. Oh, she is as willing a tit as I’ve ever had. She was spent over and over. Quite wore me out. I only told you the half of it.”

It was all lies, of course. Peg had done no such thing. Except for the single desperate visit to his room, she had kept her distance. Jarius had enjoyed contemplating which course of action he would take. Tell the truth and make the old man face his mistake, or send him to eternity with a lie

to make him squirm. The latter had seemed more likely to inflict pain.

The gurglings from Nathaniel's throat were louder. Jarius smiled. "Don't like to hear that, do you? She'd almost convinced you she was innocent, hadn't she? Well, take it to your grave, dear Stepfather. May it torment you for all eternity."

He reached inside his waistcoat and took out a folded sheet of paper. "This is your new will. I have written it out according to your instructions. I'll read it to you."

He opened the paper, shook it in mock seriousness. "*This is the last will and testament of Nathaniel Joseph Eakin Esquire of 295 Gerrard Street in the city of Toronto and the county of York. Being of sound mind ...* Debatable, but never mind, I'm going to predate it. *I hereby bequeath my goods and chattels in the following manner. To my beloved children - I call that a poetical conceit - To my beloved children, Francis John Eakin and Augusta Louisa Curran, I leave the sum of one thousand dollars each .* Not what they are hoping for, of course. *To my wife, Margaret Eakin, I leave likewise the sum of one thousand dollars, to be used for her care and maintenance as long as it is necessary .* Don't worry, she won't need that much longer. *I leave to my faithful servant, Janet Cullie, the sum of two hundred dollars .* See how kind you are in your dotage, Nathaniel. Now here's the nub. *To my dearest stepson, Jarius Gibb, whom I have ever loved and been loved by as a son of my own flesh and blood .* That's good, isn't it? Another poetical conceit. *To Jarius, I hereby leave my estate and all money that does accrue from the same, my insurance policies, and savings bonds .* A goodly sum, Stepfather, thank you. Nobody would have suspected you had such a fine dowry. I welcome it, and as we both know, it is only fair and just that it go to me. Augusta has her own husband to take care of her, Frank would piss it away on whores and horses within a month,

and dear Stepmother won't have any need. So there we are."

He had brought in his scribe's lap desk and he opened the lid, took out a pen, and dipped it in the inkwell. Then he lifted Nathaniel's flaccid hand and wrapped the fingers around the pen.

"Sign here."

Slowly, he drew the old man's signature on the paper. "Good, that will do nicely."

He blew on the ink to dry it, then replaced the paper in his pocket. "I know what you're thinking, Stepfather, but I have taken care of that. The date on the will is two days ago. Before you became incapacitated. How fortunate for us that you had the foresight to take care of your affairs. And I know Frank won't balk at getting one thousand dollars. That is better than a rope necklace."

He bent over and kissed Nathaniel on the cheek. "Good night, Stepfather. Sleep well."

He left, closing the door as softly as if he were leaving a nursery. Good. He was fairly certain the document was watertight, but just in case, there was one more thing to take care of. It was time some member of the family went to visit the unfortunate Mrs. Eakin.

Chapter Thirty-Four

THE BRANDY MURDOCH HAD DRUNK at the bawdy house was racing through his body, and there was a jauntiness in his step as he headed toward Queen Street to catch the streetcar.

When he took his seat, however, the false energy left him abruptly. The car clattered along, and before he knew it, his head drooped forward on his chest and he began to doze off.

"Sir! Sir!" The conductor was shaking his arm. "Here's your stop. The provincial asylum."

He was speaking in a hushed voice as if it were impolite to say the name out loud.

Murdoch scrambled to his feet, and conscious of the curious gaze of the other passengers, he made his way to the front. The car slowed down and halted in front of the gates. He was the only one to get off.

He hadn't been here before and didn't know what to expect. However, at first sight the asylum appeared imposing and dignified rather than frightening, although he could see the windows were barred and there were sharp-looking railings on top of the surrounding wall. The building was long with two wings, each four stories high, and a higher central block. There was a cupola over the centre pediment that gave the building an ecclesiastical appearance, but which he'd heard actually housed a water tank. Although there was currently a lot of gossip about the bad air and need for repairs, originally the asylum had been designed with pride and care and it still showed through.

The tall iron gates were open and he walked in and along a winding path to the front doors. In the garden were two fine marble fountains, now turned off for the winter.

Probably in summer the aspect was as pleasant as a public park.

He had telephoned the asylum earlier to see if it was all right for him to come, and the matron herself said she would meet him in the receiving area. He was relieved at that. As he entered the building, a uniformed doorman with impressive grey side-whiskers greeted him.

“Good day to you, sir. What is your business?”

“I am Acting Detective Murdoch. Miss Bastedo is expecting me.”

“Ah, yes. Come this way, if you please.”

He led Murdoch across the marble-tiled hall and up a flight of stairs. The place seemed deserted and Murdoch remarked on it.

“On a day like this we don’t get many visitors,” answered the doorman. “Pity really. Makes a change for the inmates to have some family company. They like variety same as everybody else.”

At the top of the stairs was a wide corridor with windowed rooms opening onto it. A sign said FEMALE PATIENTS ON LEFT. MALE PATIENTS ON RIGHT. He glanced into one of the rooms on the right. A man, head bent to his chest, was seated between a woman of middle age, quite well dressed, and a younger woman. They must have been mother and daughter by the similarity of their posture, and they were staring straight ahead, not speaking or touching the man, each lost in her own misery.

In the centre of the corridor was the matron’s office. It rather reminded him of the bridge on a ship. Windows on all sides gave her a view of the comings and goings in the reception rooms. She was writing at her desk but she looked up at their approach and came out at once to greet them.

“Mr. Murdoch, I’m Miss Bastedo. We can talk in my office. Thank you, Landry.”

The doorman bowed slightly and left them. Must have been a butler in his earlier employment, thought Murdoch. The matron, however, had none of the polite airs of a lady of leisure. She held out her hand as straightforwardly as a man might and her grip was firm indeed.

"I have arranged to have Mrs. Eakin brought down. She will be here shortly."

She indicated he should sit down and she went behind her work table, a severely plain piece of mahogany that took up most of the space in the small office. She opened a cloth-bound daybook.

"I thought we should talk about her condition beforehand. This note was completed by the attendant this morning. I'll read it to you. 'Mrs. Eakin continues to show signs of improvement. She is keeping herself clean and is generally pleasant to the staff and other inmates. She has agreed to do some light sewing and has already completed two tray covers. She is eating well and taking her tonic without complaint.' Good."

She paused. "One of the reasons Mrs. Eakin was committed to the asylum was because she was convinced somebody was trying to poison her and she had not eaten in days."

"Who is it that Mrs. Eakin thinks is trying to kill her?"

Miss Bastedo frowned. "That is the terrible thing about illusional insanity, Mr. Murdoch. The poor lunatic fears and suspects everybody. She said at first her entire family was involved, then she suspected the doctor and even perhaps the staff here, although that suspicion seems to have disappeared."

"I suppose it is not entirely impossible – that somebody is trying to poison her, I mean."

Miss Bastedo smiled at him. "That is a detective talking, Mr. Murdoch, not a physician. Many of our inmates sound quite convincing because they are sincere in their own beliefs. However, Mrs. Eakin's family has shown great

concern for her well-being. It is a rather unusual situation, as perhaps you know. She is a good deal younger than Mr. Eakin, and his own children are her age or even older. I would think there might be some tension brought about by this inequality. Her only son by her first marriage died suddenly and it was after this that she began to show the first signs of instability."

So far, what the matron was saying concurred with what he'd heard from Mrs. Curran. "I understand the boy died from peritonitis."

"That is the case. Dr. Ferrier was in attendance. The poor boy's appendix burst and nothing could be done."

"I was told by her husband that she could also be suffering from what he called erotomania."

She glanced at him sharply. "Did he now?"

"What is that exactly?"

"The patient will approach men in a lascivious and seductive manner, or express an inordinate sexual appetite often manifesting in self-abuse."

She spoke as if she were quoting from a medical textbook. It was quite different from Eakin's, "She will lift her tail to any man."

"We understand there was some inappropriate behaviour toward a family member, but she has not shown any evidence of that here. There is a possibility of surgery," she continued. "Her doctor is recommending a hysterectomy but Dr. Clark likes to proceed conservatively. We will keep her under observation for at least a week or so longer."

"Not speaking as a detective, Miss Bastedo, but simply as a man, is such an operation effective?"

She wasn't happy about the question but she was an honest woman. "Some doctors believe so, others do not."

"And you?"

"On a conservative estimate from witnessing several female patients who have been so treated, I would say it is

too early to tell. Dr. Clark himself is a great believer in fresh air, regular exercise, and a calm setting.”

Murdoch was about to ask her about the efficacy of that particular treatment, but she consulted the large gold watch that hung from her belt. “I have to do my rounds shortly. You can interview her in this office. There is always an attendant within call. Please try not to overly excite the patient, Mr. Murdoch. She is just settling here.” She sighed. “I should tell you that we received a telegram this morning from the senior member of the family. Apparently, Mrs. Eakin’s husband has suffered a severe stroke. The doctor does not think he will recover. We have not told her yet. The daughter is planning to come in later today and we will tell her then. So, please, Mr. Murdoch, don’t upset her. I suggest you make no comment if she does bring up any of her delusions.”

Murdoch wondered what he should do or say if she displayed signs of erotomania, but he didn’t quite know how to ask the matron about this.

She stood up and looked through the window. “Ha, here they are.”

He turned and could see one of the attendants leading in a patient. Small and thin, her hair in a long braid, Mrs. Eakin could have been taken for a child.

“Excuse me a moment, Mr. Murdoch,” said the matron and she went out to meet them. She had a short conversation with the attendant that he couldn’t hear. He realised the glass windows of the office were a double glaze, giving some measure of privacy. Mrs. Eakin was looking toward him the entire time. There was something about her expression he couldn’t quite identify. An eagerness perhaps, again reminding him of a child. The matron brought her into the office. He got to his feet.

“Mrs. Eakin, this is Detective Murdoch. He is conducting a police investigation and he would like to ask you some questions. You don’t need to be alarmed in any way. It is

simply a matter of routine. Miss Shelby is outside if you need her. Sit here." She pulled forward a second cane chair. "I will return in one half an hour."

She smiled at Peg, patted her arm, and bustled off. Both Murdoch and the young woman remained standing until, hesitantly, she sat down in the chair the matron had indicated. Murdoch resumed his seat facing her.

She was watching his face anxiously and he had the impression that she was straining every sense to read his countenance. "I beg your pardon, sir. Miss Bastedo did say your name, but I did not quite register it."

Her speech was quite rapid but the words were enunciated precisely, as if she were holding them tight in case they slipped away. Her accent was English.

"Murdoch. Acting Detective William Murdoch. I am pursuing a police inquiry and I hoped you might be able to help." He hesitated, searching for the right words. How could he ask her bluntly if she were awake and crying out the night Wicken died? She was sitting very still, watching him. She did not seem insane to him or in the least irrational but she was expecting something. Keeping his voice low and even, he continued.

"The matter concerns one of our constables."

Unexpectedly, her eyes lit up and she interrupted him. "Thank the Lord. He has spoken to you, then?"

"About what, ma'am?"

Murdoch had no idea why what he said was so distressing to her but the brightness on her face disappeared, replaced by something else, a look of such despair he wanted to reach over to her and make it go away. Her voice dropped so low he could hardly hear her.

"Why have you come to see me, Mr. Murdoch?"

There was no way around it. "Last week one of our officers, a Constable Wicken, was found dead in the vacant house on the corner of Gerrard and Parliament, close to your

house. The circumstances of his death are not completely clear. I thought you might help me with my inquiry."

He thought she had been sitting still before but now she seemed to freeze.

"What do you mean, he was found dead?"

"He was shot. Apparently by his own hand."

"When?"

"Monday night last."

"Was this constable fair-haired?"

"Yes, with a full moustache. Constable, second-class, Oliver Wicken. He was on duty."

She moaned and began to rock slightly back and forth in the chair. Suddenly, he had an image of a young cougar that a sailor had brought into the village when he was a boy. For five cents you could go into the hot, musty tent and view the animal. For a further penny, the sailor handed you a stick and you could poke her through the bars of the cage and "make her roar." The expression in the eyes of Mrs. Eakin and the tormented animal were the same.

He glanced out of the window, wondering if he should send for the attendant.

"Can you tell me what is the matter, ma'am? Did you know the constable? Did you see him?"

She didn't answer and he tried to find a way to reach through her fear. "What did you mean just now when you asked if he had spoken to me?"

"They must have killed him after he left. So he wouldn't talk." She was whispering as if she had no energy left to propel her voice.

"I'm afraid I don't understand. Talk about what?"

Suddenly, she jumped up and rushed at him. She was so fierce he involuntarily put up his arm to shield himself, expecting a blow, but she stopped short and caught at the lapels of his coat.

"They murdered him ..."

Her voice was high pitched and tight in her throat but her grip was strong.

Murdoch forced himself not to back off. Her pupils were dilated; there was some froth at the corner of her mouth. "Who did? Who are you referring to?"

Before she could answer, the door to the office opened and the attendant swept in.

"Now, now, Mrs. Eakin, calm yourself, please. Leave the gentleman alone."

She grabbed Peg by her wrists and snatched her away from Murdoch. Peg pulled back, trying to twist herself free.

"No, you've got to believe me ..."

Shelby spun her around so she could pin Peg's arms to her sides but, as she did so, Peg arched her back and her head jerked upward. She caught the attendant under the chin, causing her to bite through her lower lip.

Another attendant rushed in, sized up the situation at once, and ran over to a cupboard near the door. She took out a restraining jacket.

"No!" shrieked Peg. "I'll be good. I swear. I won't fight." Miss Shelby ignored her and forced her arm into the sleeve of the jacket. Murdoch could only watch helplessly while the other attendant assisted, and within moments, Peg was fastened into the restraining jacket and the strings tied behind her back. She was crying now, tears she could not wipe away. "Please, please let me out. I'll be good, I promise. I'm sorry."

"Bit late for that, isn't it?" said Miss Shelby grimly. Her white bib was spattered with blood from her bitten lip and Murdoch pulled out his handkerchief and gave it to her. He felt dreadfully responsible and wished he had never attempted the interview.

"Come now, Mrs. Eakin," said the attendant and they began to lead her away. Peg looked at him beseechingly over her shoulder, just as she had that morning. "Help me," she said.

Augusta Curran seated herself in the reception room of the asylum. There was another woman visitor in the next room who was talking to an elderly inmate. Augusta tried not to look at them, although she glimpsed some affectionate exchange. Another woman, who was wearing the institutional uniform, was down on her knees by the door, scrubbing the floor. There was a sharp smell of carbolic in the air. Augusta hoped she wouldn't meet up with anybody she knew. She had hired a cab to bring her to the asylum, but she'd got him to let her off two blocks away so he wouldn't know her true destination. As a result, her cloak was wet and the hem of her skirts was muddy from dragging through puddles on the way. She sat, chilled and miserable, clutching her basket on her lap, staring ahead. She thought it was most unfair that she was the one sent to deliver the bad news, but Frank flatly refused and Jarius claimed the sight of him or Peter might inflame Peg's already unstable mind. "Do your duty, Aggie. There's a good girl. And why don't you make her one of those lemon cream tarts she likes? It might make the visit go a little easier."

Jarius had sent Cullie off on some silly errand, which meant Augusta had to do the baking herself, and although he kept her company and tried to soothe her with sweet words and compliments, she resented it.

She had been waiting about ten minutes when the door to the reception room opened and a woman in the severe blue dress of a nurse came in. She was dark-complexioned, strong-featured, and had an indisputable air of authority.

"Mrs. Curran, I'm Miss Bastedo, the matron."

"How do you do?"

The matron sat down in the chair next to her. "I regret to say that Mrs. Eakin has had a bad spell. She is still quite unsettled and we think it better if she doesn't have visitors at the moment."

"What sort of bad spell?"

"A police detective came to interview her. Unfortunately, I had no idea it would upset her as much as it did. She became quite hysterical and she has had to be restrained."

"I knew he shouldn't have come. He insisted. He doesn't realise how unstable she really is."

"I am of the opinion that any mention of death completely unnerves her," said Miss Bastedo. "It brings back her memories of the sad demise of her son. We must be very careful what we say to her and only discuss the most cheerful topics until she is much stronger. It will be wise not to mention the illness of Mr. Eakin at this point."

"Yes, of course."

"Perhaps you could come back in two or three days? We have every confidence she will be quite improved by then."

"Yes, yes, I will." Augusta was eager to make a good impression on the matron, as she had an uneasy feeling Miss Bastedo did not approve of her. She took a cake tin out of the basket.

"I brought her a lemon tart."

"You can leave it with me. I will make sure she gets it."

Augusta thanked her and took her leave. She was only too glad not to come face to face with Peg. The woman terrified her.

Chapter Thirty-Five

IN PART BECAUSE DETECTIVE MURDOCH had declared the blow to the attendant was an accident, Peg was released from the restraining jacket and had been given only a mild chloral sedative. She had fallen into a restless sleep where images surfaced and sank and surfaced again. Shelby dabbing at her cut lip, glaring at her; Mr. Murdoch in his long coat, brown eyes troubled as he talked to her; Miss Bastedo, grave-faced, telling her that Augusta had come to visit, although Peg was certain she hadn't actually seen her.

She could hear somebody moaning, *oh, oh* , but she couldn't sort out what the sound was. The cry was sharp and Peg sat up in bed.

Emma Foster was also sitting up. She was clutching at her stomach and it was she who was moaning. Suddenly, she vomited on the coverlet.

"Oh, oh," she groaned and another spasm gripped her. The vomitus was mixed with blood. She cried out and rolled onto her side, the violent momentum sending her crashing to the floor. Peg jumped out of bed and rushed over to her.

"Mrs. Foster! What is it?"

The old woman couldn't answer but lay thrashing in spasms that shook her entire body. A rush of watery diarrhoea came from her bowels. The smell coming from her was vile. Peg looked around desperately for something to use, and as she did so, she saw the cake tin sitting on the bedside cupboard. It was black with red and white flowers painted on it. The last time she had seen it was in the kitchen of the Eakin house. The knowledge stabbed at her chest, so that for a moment she could hardly breathe. Hurriedly, she pried off the lid. Inside was a cream tart, one

large piece missing. Panting now, she bent over the sick woman.

"Mrs. Foster, did you eat the tart?"

But she knew she had. One of the attendants must have put the tin in Peg's cupboard and Emma had stolen it in order to help herself to some of the delicacy.

Both Miss Anderson and Mrs. Mallory were sitting up.

"One of you, bang on the door for Reid."

Miss Anderson started to sing "We Will Gather by the River" and Mrs. Mallory pulled the quilt over her head, whimpering.

Peg got up and ran to the door. "Mrs. Reid! Help!" She heard footsteps outside the door, saw the attendant's alarmed face in the window, and the key was turned in the lock and the door flung open.

"What on earth ...?"

She saw Mrs. Foster's plight and rushed over to her. The floor was slippery with vomit and blood and she gasped as she trod in it.

"She's been poisoned," cried Peg. "She ate some of the tart. Look!"

Reid waved her hand. "Never mind that now. Go and fetch Miss Corley as fast as you can. She's in the sitting room."

"It was meant for me."

"Nonsense. Please do as I ask, Mrs. Eakin."

Suddenly, Peg felt as if her mind were functioning on its own with no connection to her body. The fragile sense of security that had been growing while she was tucked away in the asylum shattered like glass. She was safe nowhere. She had to escape.

She ran from the bedroom. Outside in the corridor, the wooden warning flag in the ceiling dropped down. Reid must have pressed the electric button in the room to signify there was trouble. Peg knew an attendant would be coming soon. The only place to go was the dining room directly across from her. She tried the door and it was unlocked. Quickly

she slipped inside and leaned against the door, listening. The blood was pounding in her ears, making it difficult to hear anything else. She tried to will herself to be calm. She didn't have a lot of time before Reid realised she hadn't done as she was told.

Even through the closed door she could hear Mrs. Foster's cries.

The dim room was unlit but she could see sufficiently to make her way over to the dumb waiter, which was in the far corner. She slid open the doors and pulled hard on the rope that brought up the lift. It was light and came up easily. For a moment, as she gazed into the small cupboardlike space, her resolve almost failed. *Now! Do it!* She climbed in, hoping desperately it would hold her weight. There was barely enough room but she curled up tightly, and except for a slight shaking, it held. She pulled the doors closed. As soon as she did, she was in pitch darkness. A wave of fear grabbed her but she forced herself to concentrate on the task. She caught hold of one of the ropes and began to pull hard, hand over hand. With a creak, the lift began to descend. There was another access on the second floor but she pulled steadily past it, her arms aching in the cramped space. *Just one more floor to go* . At last, with a bump, she reached the kitchen level. There was no handle on this side of the doors and she scrabbled at the wood, trying to open them, breaking her fingernails. She was sweating, fighting back panic. She couldn't get out. Could she breathe? Was there enough air? There was a sharp pain in her back from being bent over but there was no room to move around. Finally, the doors yielded sufficiently for her to make a space wide enough to get her fingers through. Then she wriggled her hand in and she could push the doors back.

She had gambled on the fact that there would be nobody working in the kitchen at this hour, but she didn't know for certain. However, the place was in darkness. Stiffly, she climbed out of the lift and immediately fell to the ground as

her knees gave way. She knelt on the floor, listening. There were no sounds of racing footsteps, no voices calling an alarm. She stayed where she was, crouching like a dog. She had no idea where she would go even if she did manage to get out of here. She'd seen all too clearly the expression on the detective's face. He had been kind but she knew he thought her mad. She should have been calm, talked reasonably, but the shock of what he said was too much. She had been waiting for Wicken to come and she was sure he was investigating her accusations as he had promised. She sank even lower to the floor. She couldn't struggle any more. It was all too big for her. They were too powerful.

Probably only a minute had elapsed but she felt as if she had been lying here on the flagstones for a long time, her cheek pressed against the cold surface. *If only she had some proof. Something more than the word of a deranged woman against that of a respectable family*. Bitterness was like bile in her mouth. They were hypocrites all of them. Nathaniel, Frank the cheater, and especially Jarius Gibb. She sat upright. Jarius's diary! Shortly after Charley died, desperate, she had started to prowl around the house whenever she had the opportunity, looking for evidence. She already knew of the existence of Jarius's journal, because one evening she went to call him to dinner and accidentally interrupted him. He was writing in a ledger and he closed the book at once. "I do value my privacy, Stepmother." Words said in a tone so biting, she had shrunk away. After that, she'd observed him and his habits. She knew how often he left late at night, how furtive he was. Not too long ago, she had decided to risk going back to his room. She'd found the key under his chair and unlocked the scribe's lap desk. The ledger was his private diary and what she read there made her face burn with shame. He had recorded the events of her entry into the household and had not tempered his utter contempt for her or his dislike of her son.

She had the sense he wrote down everything that happened. Surely there would be something there that would help her, something revealing she could show to the detective who had come today.

She got to her feet, shivering. None of the ranges were lit, waiting for the early morning workers to rake them out and start them up. It was easier to see now, and frantic, she looked around for something she could use. She was barefoot and clad only in her nightgown. *Thank God* . Over by the door was a row of hooks for the kitchen workers to hang their coats and hats. There were two things, a pair of felt slippers and a rubber waterproof cloak. She thrust her cold feet into the slippers, which for that moment seemed as luxurious as anything she had ever worn. The waterproof was too long for her and dragged on the floor but she had to use it.

Hurry, hurry . She ran over to the window and pushed up the sash. There were no bars. Encumbered by the heavy waterproof, she climbed over the sill, dropping quickly to the ground, soft and muddy from the unrelenting rain. She almost lost one of the slippers in the dirt and she took them both off and stuffed them in the pockets of the waterproof. Barefoot, she ran toward the path that was just visible in front. She knew it must lead to the stables and the far end of the garden. Not too distant, there was a dark tree, leafless now but broad and thick-branched. She halted here, panting and gulping for air. From the shelter of the trunk she peeked toward the building. Lights were lit on the east wing where she'd come from, but so far, the rest of the institution was in darkness. They wouldn't want to sound an alarm yet. They'd search the ward first. She might have at least an hour before they realised she had got out. She set off again. She had to be careful as she approached the stable, because she knew there would be one or two men sleeping there, but she got past without incident and then she was at the wall. There was a low iron railing along the top, making

the entire height about eight feet. She stopped again, breathing hard. *A ladder. There must be a ladder*. She turned around and jogtrotted to the shed that was at the edge of the vegetable garden. Against the wall she could see a tarpaulin that was draped over some long object. Almost crying with the hope of it, she fumbled with the rope that was tying down the end. Her fingers were clumsy with cold but she finally undid the knots and was able to pull back the covering. There were three ladders underneath and she tugged at the one uppermost. It was heavy and difficult to move but her fear gave her strength and it finally slid free. She dragged it to the wall, hoisted it up, and climbed up. The top rung reached just below the iron railings that surmounted the wall. Here she hesitated, looking down the steep drop. But she had only one option. She held onto the railing, hoisted herself up, and swung one leg over so that she was balanced astride on the narrow toehold. For a moment, she swayed dangerously but she clung to the railing and began to lower herself until she was dangling. She let go and landed awkwardly on the muddy ground. She had to wait a moment to get her breath, then she got to her feet and put on the slippers. They were useless for protection against the wet but they would make her less conspicuous. Head bent into the pelting rain, she set off as fast as she could manage around the outside of the wall toward Queen Street.

The macadam pavement was black with rain and the streetcar tracks glistened in the flickering gas lamps. There was not a soul abroad. She pulled up the collar of the waterproof to hide the fact that her hair was unpinned and began to walk away from the asylum. She could not allow herself to think what would happen if her plan didn't work - if Jarius was at home. Her teeth were chattering uncontrollably and her entire body was trembling. But she was out.

Chapter Thirty-Six

EDDY TINGLE BLEW HARD INTO HIS GLOVE , trying to get some warm air onto his fingers. His thoughts about his passenger were becoming decidedly unchristian. She must have been gone for a good ten minutes by now. Had he been conned, he wondered? She didn't look too respectable but she spoke good, sounded like a lady's maid, which is what she said she was. She'd flagged him down on Queen Street, practically weeping with the relief of seeing him.

"I was afraid I would have to walk all the way home," she said. "I've been watching my sister, who is poorly from childbed, but I've got to get back. My mistress doesn't even know I'm out. I'll be dismissed without a letter if she finds out. But what could I do? She's my only sister and all alone except for the one girl to tend her."

This had poured out of her, unasked. Tingle hadn't really hesitated. He was going that way home anyway and another fare was gravy on the pie. Not that he completely believed her story. She was a bedraggled scrap of a girl without hat or gloves. More like she was visiting a sweetheart, had a quarrel, and ran out all of a huff.

"Where do you want to go?"

She gave him an address on Gerrard Street east of Parliament.

"It's extra charge after midnight, you know."

"That's all right."

"Hop in, then." And she had jumped right fast into his cab. He got a bit of a trot out of Blackie and they were up at Gerrard in about a half an hour. Just as they were approaching the number she had given him, she opened up the small trap in the roof of the cab.

“Cabbie, I’ve just discovered I have left my purse at my sister’s house. You will have to wait while I go in and get some money. How much is it?”

“It’s fare and a half after midnight and you were also in the second zone. That makes it three dollars.”

He pulled up in front of the house. It was set back a bit from the road and looked quite grand. His passenger got out of the cab and scurried off, her long cloak dragging on the wet pavement.

She went through the gate, walked quickly down the path, and disappeared around the side of the house to the servants’ entrance. Tingle waited. He gave her enough time to get in, go to her room, which would be on the third floor, get her money, and come right out again. He tucked his hands between his knees under the beaver throw that covered him. He was ready for a kip. He didn’t like night fares, but earlier, he’d picked up a gentleman outside the National Club on Bay Street and brought him out to the west end of the city. Swell of a fellow, evening dress, cloak, but full as a soldier. He’d delivered him to a house on Jane Street and left him to the not-so-tender mercies of his wife. Tipped well but it made for a long night. So this girl’s fare had seemed a bit of a blessing. Until now. Blackie shifted restlessly. He wanted the comfort of his stable. Stiffly, Tingle climbed down from his perch. Time to investigate Miss Lady’s Maid.

He followed in her footsteps through the gate and around to the back of the house. There was not a light to be seen, the household was asleep. He tried the back door but it was firmly locked. He banged hard on the door. “Anybody at home?” Bang, bang. “Hey, in there!”

He saw a light flare in a second-floor window and he knocked again. In a few minutes, the door opened and an elderly man in a flannel dressing robe appeared on the threshold.

“What the devil do you want at this time of night?”

"My fare, that's what. I just delivered a young woman to this house. She's your mistress's maid and she owes me three dollars."

The man leaned forward and ostentatiously sniffed the air. "Are you drunk? You've come to the wrong house. There is no mistress, only my master and he doesn't have a maid; never did nor never will."

"What are you gabbling about? She said she lived here. She came through the gate. Said she had to get her money. She was watching her sister over on Queen Street and left her purse there."

"She's told you a nailer, my lad," said the butler with some satisfaction. "The only person of the female persuasion in this house is my wife, Mrs. Bezley, and she's in bed, until a few minutes ago enjoying a well-deserved sleep."

Tingle looked around him. "But where'd the girl go then?"

"She's done a bunk. Must have been trying to avoid ponying up."

He went to close the door but Tingle stopped him. "What about the neighbours? Anybody close by have a lady's maid?"

"Not on the right nor the left. The Eakins, two houses down, have a general servant that's a girl. What did your one look like?"

"A titch. Spoke good."

"That's not Cullie. She's a big lass. Anyway, no sense in me catching my death standing out here. You've been bamboozled and that's all there is to it. Good night to you."

He closed the door.

"Arse crawler," said Tingle. He was tempted to knock again but knew it wouldn't get him anywhere. The girl must have gone through the rear gate to the laneway at the rear of the house. She'd be well on her way now.

He made his way back to his cab. Sod it. He was going to make a report to the police. He hated his good nature being

taken advantage of and this girl had gulled him. He climbed back into his seat, clucked to Blackie, and they turned around and headed off down Parliament Street toward the police station.

Peg had done exactly what Tingle surmised. She had run along the laneway, which ended at the Eakin property, two houses down. Here, she crouched by the gate, afraid to move until she was sure the cabbie wasn't going to pursue her. She could hear him banging on the door and, shortly after, the sound of voices. Silence, only the soft patter of the rain, until finally she heard the clop of the horse's hooves as the cab moved off. As soon as the sound had faded completely, she opened the gate and ran across the cobblestone yard to the rear door of the house. She was inside at once. The door opened into a small passageway at the end of which was the back staircase. She knew this was the way Jarius went when he left at night. For these excursions, he always wore a shabby overcoat of dark English tweed, quite unlike the formal black business coat of the day. She could barely make out the coat stand that was beside the door, and feeling almost more than seeing, she checked whether the tweed coat was there. It was not and the flood of relief she felt made her dizzy. Jarius had gone out.

Immediately, she took off the cumbersome waterproof and hung it on the stand. There was an old green cape belonging to Augusta on the peg and she slipped it on, burying her face in the soft fur trim and hugging herself tightly to feel the warmth of the flannel lining. She knelt down, searching for the boots that were usually kept on a rack beside the stand. There were four pairs, one of them her own, a pair of red kid. She kicked off the soaking felt slippers and pulled on the boots, not stopping to button them. The warmth from the cloak and the boots gave her

renewed strength, and she hurried as quickly as she could up the stairs to the second floor. Here, she waited briefly but there was no sound in the house, nobody had been disturbed. Carefully, she pushed open the door that led onto the landing. There was a candle burning in the hall sconce and she could see another faint light shining beneath the door of Nathaniel's bedroom. Her heart lurched. Was he still awake? She stood still, listening. Faintly, she could hear his windy snores. He must have fallen asleep with the candle lit. She crossed the landing, pressed her ear against Jarius's door, and hearing nothing, she went inside.

The curtains were closed and the room was dark. She would have to risk lighting a lamp. Forced to move more slowly, she felt her way to the mantelpiece. Here she fumbled for the box of matches, found them, and struck one. Jarius's bed was made and tidy. The room smelled like him. She lit the lamp, turning the wick low, and crossed over to his chair where the key was hidden. For a moment she couldn't find it and almost panicked but there it was in the leather pouch. Rationally, she knew she had only been in the house a very short time, but her fear was mounting. She had to hurry.

The lap desk wouldn't open at first and she fiddled desperately with the key. Finally, the lock yielded. The ledger was inside and she took it out, hugging it to her chest as if it were a beloved infant.

She had already started toward the door when she heard a footstep on the landing outside.

The door opened and Augusta stood on the threshold. Her hand flew to her mouth in shock. "You! What are you doing here? Where's Jarius?"

For a second, Peg stared at her, transfixed.

"Why are you wearing my cloak?" gasped Augusta.

Peg bolted. Augusta was taken off guard and the force of Peg's charge sent her reeling to the floor, so that she dropped her candlestick. Peg raced back the way she had

come, out to the yard. She was heading for the front gate when she saw a man coming along the street. A tall man in policeman's uniform. She swerved away and ran toward the barn, the only place she could hide.

Murdoch was dreaming he was in his childhood bed. Somehow, his mother had got herself locked out and she was knocking on the door. *Wake up, Will! Wake up, I've got to get your father's tea going*. He was trying to open his eyes, straining to see, but the room was too dark. He had to get up and let her in before his father came home, but he couldn't move.

Suddenly, he was awake and in the present. Somebody was knocking at the front door.

"Mr. Murdoch! Mr. Murdoch!"

He jumped out of bed, grabbed his trousers from the chair, and pulled them on over his nightshirt.

Again the persistent knocking and the half-hissed call. "Mr. Murdoch!"

He opened his bedroom door and at the same time, Enid Jones appeared on the landing. She was holding a night candle and, in spite of the circumstances, his heart jumped at the sight of her. She was dressed in a red flannel robe and her hair was down, loosely braided. She looked still soft from sleep.

"What is it? Who's knocking?" she asked.

"I'm just going to see."

He hadn't waited to strike a light and she held out her candlestick.

"Take my candle."

He did so and hurried down to the hall. Mrs. Kitchen emerged from her room.

"Who on earth is here at this time of night?"

Murdoch opened the door.

A tall, gangly young constable was standing outside, his dark lantern pointed downward.

He touched his forefinger to the rim of his helmet in greeting.

"Constable Dewhurst here. Sorry to disturb you at this hour, sir, but Sergeant Hales thought I should fetch you. We've heard from the asylum that the lunatic lady, Mrs. Eakin, has managed to run away. It seems like she's come back to her home."

"Good heavens! Have you got her?"

"Not yet, sir. The matron had only just telephoned. She wanted us to go and notify the family. The sergeant was about to send me over there when up shows a cabbie, name of Tingle."

The constable's words were rapid and excited. The drama was spicing up an otherwise dull evening. "He came in right at that moment to report on a fare who had gammoned him. We knew from his description it was one and the same woman. He'd picked her up on Queen Street not far from the loony bin and dropped her off right near the house."

"Did the matron give you any more information?"

"Only that the woman has lost all of her slates. One of the inmates was taken ill in the night, gastritis probably, and Mrs. Eakin took it as a sign she was being poisoned. The matron thinks she could be dangerous. To herself or to her family. Sergeant Hales decided to go over himself. He wanted me to get you, seeing as you know the woman in question."

Murdoch was already dragging on his boots.

"Here!" Mrs. Kitchen, who had heard all this, handed him his hat and coat. "Please be careful." He gave a quick glance up the stairs and saw Enid was still standing on the landing, watching. The concern on her face warmed him.

"The cabbie's waiting outside," said Dewhurst. "We requisitioned him."

He led the way.

"Did you telephone the asylum?" Murdoch asked.

"Yes, sir. They're sending somebody right over."

Like the constable, Eddy Tingle was finding this quite an adventure, and he grinned at Murdoch as he climbed into the cab.

"Where to, sir?"

"Corner of Gerrard Street and Parliament. Can you get that nag of yours to at least trot?"

"Looks are deceiving. He can run like a thoroughbred when he needs to."

"This is one such occasion then."

Dewhurst got onto the step, holding on to the door handle.

"Scorch it, Tingle," said Murdoch. The cabbie cracked his whip over the horse's head and they lunged into a gallop up the sleeping street.

Chapter Thirty-Seven

SERGEANT HALES PUSHED OPEN THE GATE and went into the yard. As he did so, a man and a woman in night clothes appeared at the rear door. He recognised Peter Curran from the inquest. When the woman saw him, she cried out.

"Officer! There's a madwoman on the loose. Did you see her?"

"Yes, ma'am, I believe I did. She has just run into the barn."

Mrs. Curran gasped. "My brother is in there. You must do something. She'll kill him."

She made as if to run to the barn and Hales caught her arm. "Hold on, ma'am."

At that moment, another man came through the gate behind him. It was Jarius Gibb. He went over to the woman.

"Aggie, what on earth is the matter?"

"She was here, Jarius. In your room. She knocked me down."

Mrs. Curran was almost incoherent with fear. Her husband made no move to comfort her and stood like a simpleton, staring at the sergeant.

"You mean Stepmother?"

"Yes. Oh, she's quite mad, Jarius. She was standing there, in my cloak. She ran at me."

Gibb turned to Hales.

"Officer, what is going on?"

"We've had a telephone message from the asylum, sir. Apparently, Mrs. Eakin has run away."

Augusta interrupted him. "Oh, what a shock she gave me. I thought it was you in there, Jarius. She stole your ledger. Why would she want that? And my cloak?"

"Hush. Peter, is Frank in the barn?"

"S'far as I know. He went over there at midnight, same as usual."

"She'll kill him," repeated Augusta.

"Ma'am, try to calm yourself," Hales interceded. "She's a slip of a woman and he's a strong grown man. I doubt she'll hurt him."

"We can't count on that, Sergeant," said Gibb. "My brother often drinks himself into a stupor. There are many knives available to her if she wants to do him harm. And a shotgun. It is still there by the door, isn't it, Peter?"

Curran nodded. "S'far as I know."

Gibb turned to Hales. "I'm going to go into the barn, Sergeant. We must do something."

"Begging your pardon, sir, but I don't think that's a good idea. A doctor is on his way from the asylum. He's better to handle it."

"She's terrified of doctors. He will only make her more disturbed. I'm the one who should talk to her. She knows me and trusts me. Isn't that so, Aggie?"

"I, er ... oh, Jarius."

"I'll come in with you then, sir."

"No, Officer. Absolutely not. She fears police even more than she does doctors. You can wait outside. If I need help, don't worry, I'll call for you."

"Jarius, what about Frank?"

"Be quiet, Aggie. I'm doing what I can." His voice was sharper, impatient. "Officer, may I take your lantern?"

Rather reluctantly, Hales handed over the light. Leaving the Currans at the door, he and Jarius hurried across the wet cobblestones to the barn. When they reached the doors, Gibb stopped, cocking his head to listen. There was no sound from inside except the soft snicker of a horse, no indication that the sleeping Frank had awoken. With a nod at the sergeant, Gibb swung open the door and stepped inside.

Hales heard the sound of the bolt being closed behind him.

Jarius waited for a moment, swinging the lantern high above him.

"Peg? Stepmother? Don't be afraid. You can come out." Gibb wanted to make his voice pleasant and reassuring, but even to his own ears, it didn't sound that way. He walked over to the corner of the barn where Frank slept in a partitioned-off room.

His brother was fast asleep, face-down on his bed and fully dressed. The room reeked of stale beer. Jarius shook him awake, hard and roughly.

"Get up, you sot. Come on, rouse yourself."

Frank blinked into the light. "What's the matter?"

"Our dear stepmother has escaped from the loony bin. She's hiding in the barn somewhere."

"In here?" Frank was still stupid with drink. "How'd she get in here?"

"Never mind that now. Get on your feet. There's a police sergeant outside. I said I'd bring her out nice and quiet."

He put the lantern on a wooden box beside the bed, took off his overcoat and threw it across the bed, and went over to a shelf where Frank kept his shotgun.

"Where are the shells?"

"Why? What are you doing?"

"You know damn well what I'm doing. I'm going to save your arse for the second time. Where are the shells?"

"In that box."

Jarius snapped a cartridge into the shotgun. "You look in the stalls. I'll do the tack room."

"Jarius -"

Gibb swung the gun around so that it was pointing at Frank. "It will be quite easy to have two accidents instead of

one. She aimed this gun at you, you struggled, boom. You both die.”

“My God, are you going to shoot her?”

“Do I have a choice?”

“She doesn’t really know what happened.”

“It’s got nothing to do with that.”

“What then?”

“For Christ’s sake, Frank. Why are you always so stupid? You know the woman is in the way.”

He tucked the gun under his arm and gave his brother a shove. “Come on. We don’t have much time.”

Peg saw Jarius come into the barn and heard him call to her. She had run into the carriage room and was crouched in the far corner. He must have gone to wake up Frank because she heard voices. She crept to the edge of the partition that separated the carriage room from the rest of the barn. She peered through a crack in the wall. Frank and Jarius emerged and Jarius was carrying a shotgun.

She ran for it.

In front of her was the ladder to the loft and she was up it in a flash.

“There she is,” Jarius shouted.

Peg tripped and sprawled on the floor. She knew Jarius must be close behind her and she turned, cowering against one of the hay bales. She heard somebody climbing up the ladder and Jarius’s head and shoulders appeared.

“Please don’t shoot me. You can have the book. I won’t tell anybody.” But she wasn’t even sure she had spoken out loud. If she had, the words made no impact on Jarius. He turned sideways, leaning against the ladder so he could take aim. There was a terrifying deliberation in his movements, as if he were on a duck shoot and preparing himself.

Frank came up close behind him holding a lantern.

Peg tried to press herself into a bale. Jarius raised the gun and she heard the click as he cocked the trigger. She covered her head with her arms.

Chapter Thirty-Eight

TINGLE HAD JUST PULLED UP HIS CAB in front of the Eakin house when Murdoch heard the boom of the shotgun. Sergeant Hales was standing in front of the barn doors with Augusta Curran and her husband. He saw Murdoch.

"This way," he shouted, and he started to run along the side of the stable. Murdoch raced after him, Constable Dewhurst at his heels. They were at the side door in a moment and into the barn. Horses were screaming and the air was thick with the smell of cordite. Frank Eakin was lying on his back close to the wood stove. Jarius Gibb was almost on top of him. Somebody was moaning dreadful sounds of pain. As Hales and Murdoch approached, Jarius tried to get to his feet but his leg splayed out at an angle, and with a cry he fell forward.

Murdoch felt rather than heard the whisper from above his head. Peg was looking down at him.

"Here. I'm up here," she said.

Peg was not injured but in such a state of terror, she was unable to move. Murdoch hoisted her over his shoulder, fireman style, and carried her out of the stable, while Hales tended to Gibb and Frank. He sent in Tingle to calm the horses and ordered the Currans into the house under the supervision of Constable Dewhurst. Augusta was weeping ceaselessly, her antagonism for her brother apparently forgotten. Her husband said nothing.

Peg was seated on the bench in the yard and it took several minutes before she could stop a kind of dry, choking sob. She kept repeating that she had dropped Jarius's diary

in the barn, and it was only Murdoch's firm insistence that he would get it that calmed her down. He chafed her hands and kept talking to her and finally she was able to tell him what had happened. When she tried to relate how Jarius had stood and aimed the shotgun at her as if he were at a hunt, she broke down again, and Murdoch had to wait patiently for her to recover. She was not entirely sure what had happened next, but she had the impression Frank had grabbed Jarius to stop him and they had both fallen from the ladder.

At that point, Dr. Clark arrived with two burly attendants from the asylum. Fortunately, he was a sensible man and, when he saw how Peg was with Murdoch, he made no attempt to interfere. Murdoch accepted responsibility for his charge and the doctor hurried into the barn to tend to the injured men.

As soon as Tingle had dealt with the horses, Murdoch persuaded Peg to go with the cabbie to the Kitchens'. He made her promise she wouldn't try to run away but he knew she wouldn't. She was still dreadfully shaken, but as far as he could see, she was quite sane. He knew that Mrs. Kitchen would take very good care of her, and if Peg needed anything, it was some motherly attention.

That done, he went into the barn.

Dr. Clark had just finished administering morphine to Jarius Gibb, who was propped up against the knee of one of the attendants. Sergeant Hales had brought out more lamps and the scene was bathed in light.

"Mr. Gibb has dislocated his hip," said Clark when he saw Murdoch. "We can take him to the hospital, momentarily."

"And Mr. Eakin?"

"He cannot be moved. I fear his back is broken."

Frank looked dreadful. His skin was ashen and his face was already swollen, his eyelids puffed to the point of closure.

Murdoch crouched down beside Jarius Gibb. "Can I ask you what happened, sir?"

Jarius scowled. "I've already talked to the sergeant. I'm not going to repeat it."

"As you wish." Murdoch stood up and pointedly beckoned to Hales, drawing him off to one side, out of earshot.

"According to Mrs. Eakin, she was up there in the loft and Gibb climbed up and was about to shoot her. She thinks Frank saved her bacon by grabbing Gibb and they both fell. What did he tell you?"

"He said she was the one with the gun and that he climbed the ladder so that he could talk to her. Persuade her to come down. She aimed at him. He managed to wrest the gun from her, in the process of which it went off. Then he lost his balance and fell off the ladder, taking his brother with him."

"Is that likely, do you think?"

"Dog droppings, if you ask me. Look over there." Hales pointed to a low, splintered hole in the next partition. "I'd say the gun hit the floor and discharged and I'll wager it was him was holding it when he fell. He intended to kill the woman, I'm sure of it. When I got to the house, I saw Mrs. Eakin running into the barn. Just then Gibb came up. Said he could look after it." Hales frowned in chagrin. "I shouldn't have allowed him to go in but he was soft as shite. I've seen lunatics before and I know how riled up they get at the sight of a uniform. So I let him. But as soon as I heard him throw the bolt behind him, I knew something wasn't right. I'd have gone after him at once but Mrs. Curran got all hysterical and I had her to deal with."

"There's some kind of diary of Gibb's that Mrs. Eakin came to get. She thinks she dropped it in here somewhere. I'll have a look."

Gibb had been watching them while they talked, but he was distracted by the pain of Dr. Clark trying to immobilize his hip with a makeshift splint. Murdoch crossed in front of him and went into the tack room. A black official-looking ledger was lying in the straw. He picked it up, opened it, and glanced at the contents. He saw enough to think that Peg was right. Holding the journal, Murdoch returned to the doctor. One of the attendants had laid out the stretcher and they were about to lift Gibb onto it. He scowled at Murdoch.

"That's mine, I believe. May I have it?"

"I'm afraid not, sir. Police property until this case is cleared up."

"What case is that, officer? You saw her. She's insane. Can't help herself. I won't press charges."

"That's not what I'm referring to," said Murdoch, and he tapped the ledger. "Let's see if this gives us some answers."

"Lie down, if you please, Mr. Gibb," said one of the attendants. "We're going to lift you."

Reluctantly, Jarius obeyed and the two men heaved him onto the stretcher. Although the movement must have caused him great pain, Jarius only grunted. He had expressed no concern for Frank, or Peg for that matter. He lay looking up at the ceiling but Murdoch knew there had been fear in his eyes and he was glad of it. The attendants carried him out to the ambulance.

Murdoch turned his attention back to Frank Eakin.

"How is he?" he asked the doctor.

Clark shook his head for an answer. He took a small bottle out of his bag, unscrewed the top, and held the vial underneath the injured man's nose. Frank opened his eyes, flinching. He couldn't move his head away from the stinging smell.

"Can you get this weight off my chest?" he whispered. "I can't breathe."

Dr. Clark shook his head. "Mr. Eakin, there is no weight, you have been injured."

"I can't seem to move my arms. Have you tied them down?"

"No, we haven't, sir."

A look of panic came into Frank's eyes. "I must have hit my back on the stove. Jarius was on top of me."

He licked his lips. "Could I have a drink of water?"

"I'll get him some," said Hales.

"Am I dying?" Frank asked; his breath was raspy.

Dr. Clark was a decent man and his voice was gentle when he spoke. "If you wish I can send for a minister immediately."

"No. I thought I heard that detective. Is he here?"

"Yes, I am." Murdoch knelt down, leaning in close.

"I must talk. Tell you the truth."

Hales had returned with a dipper and a bowl of water. The doctor dribbled water on Frank's mouth. Murdoch bent over again.

"Mr. Eakin, Frank. Do you want to make an official statement?"

"Yes, I do."

"I am sorry to say this, but for such a statement to be valid in a court of law, I must ask you if you are fully aware of your present circumstances."

Frank blinked. "That I'm a goner, you mean?"

"Yes. That you realise you are dying and that what you are about to say is a true statement on your deathbed."

"I understand."

"Sergeant Hales, please write down what Mr. Eakin says."

Murdoch waited for the sergeant to take out his notebook and pencil. "According to Mr. Gibb, Mrs. Eakin had the shotgun and was about to fire at him. Is this true?"

Anger seemed to give Frank strength. "No! Other way around. He's a cold-hearted devil as ever walked on the earth and I ain't going to die without him getting his comeuppance, same as me ... He was going to shoot her. I stopped him. I couldn't bear seeing her like that. Scared

witless. I suppose you might say, the worm turned. He didn't expect that. I grabbed his legs and we fell." He managed to meet Murdoch's eyes. "Is he hurt?"

"Yes. He's smashed his hip."

"Too bad it wasn't worse. And her?"

"She's in good hands. She will be all right ... Frank, Mrs. Eakin says Constable Wicken came to the house the night he died ..."

"Yes, he did. We'd all had a terrible barney the night before. Cooked up by Jarius, of course, and she was barricaded in the upstairs room. She'd called to Wicken from the window and he'd come to see what was the matter."

He gagged and yellowish spittle ran from his mouth. Clark took a sponge from his bag and wiped him.

"Joke was, the three of us, Peter, him, and me, had been having a talk about what to do with her. Jarius kept saying as how she was a loony and should be shut away. Didn't seem like that to me but he was pushing it. Then in comes the frog and she starts to tell him she was being poisoned ..."

"Was she?"

"Not by me, nor Aggie, I'm sure. But I wouldn't put anything past Jarius. He hated her from the first moment she come here. Thinks she's going to whelp and cut him out."

His breath was so harsh Murdoch wondered if he could keep on. He glanced at the doctor, who put his fingers on Eakin's pulse. He used the vial of ammonia again and Frank continued, his words faster, as if he were trying to outrace death.

"I could tell the frog was swayed. Told her he'd look into it. Then she said other things. About me and the horses. Fiddling. He said he wanted to see the stables. He insisted and we all marched over. When he examined the horses, he got his dander up, cos he saw what I'd been doing. Him and

me had words. It made me hot. I hit him. Hard. Side of the head ... He fell down."

Tears started to spill from under the swollen eyelids. "He was just a young fella ... I didn't mean to do for him ... Will I go to hell for it?"

Murdoch winced. "Our Father is ever merciful."

He wasn't sure if Eakin even heard him but his urgency pushed him on. "Jarius took over as always. 'You've killed him, Frank,' he says, but did I? Did I? He looked bad, white as paint, but maybe he wasn't dead, I don't know. Jarius made us wrap him in a blanket and carry him over to the empty house. He had the key. 'I'm doing this for your sake,' he said, and he got Peter to prop him up. Then he shot him with his own revolver ... he aimed it at the place where I'd hit him. He said it would be easy to make it look like suicide. He wrote the note and he got one of his whores to testify. The one you saw."

His voice died away and Dr. Clark wagged his finger at Murdoch, warning him.

Murdoch took the sponge, wetted it, and bathed Frank's face and mouth. That seemed to revive him sufficiently for him to continue.

"That bastard shouldn't get away with it. He kept saying he was protecting me but he wasn't. It meant he had me good then, forever. He made me put the revolver in between the officer's legs. He thought it was a good joke. I'm sorry I did that; it wasn't right."

Again the tears spilled out and down his cheeks.

"Funny, ain't it. Papa's up there not able to move and I'm down here in the same way. Like father, like son. What a laugh. Well, at least he can say I'm following in his footsteps now."

There was a sob that couldn't get past the paralysed walls of his chest and Murdoch could see the light was leaving his eyes.

"I think you've got all you need, Mr. Murdoch," said the doctor. "His sister should pay her last respects now."

Murdoch stood up. He wanted to say something to the dying man, something that might ease his soul into the next life, but even as he looked down at him, he saw it was too late.

Dr. Clark put the back of his hand under Frank's nose to check for breath. After a moment, he shook his head.

"He's gone."

He lifted Frank's wrist to confirm there was no pulse and then laid the dead man's hands across his chest. "Sergeant, will you be so good as to bring in Mrs. Curran and her husband."

Hales put away his notebook and with a nod at Murdoch he left. The patrol sergeant was a man vindicated.

"We'll need to send for a coroner and gather a jury," continued Clark.

"I'll see to that."

There was no more to be done here, and Murdoch thought Augusta was owed some privacy in her grief. He'd wait until she had finished before he spoke to Peter Curran.

He went outside to the yard. After the brightness of the barn, the night seemed dark. He took a deep breath, shivering in the cold air. A horse whinnied softly nearby. Tingle had brought two of the horses out of the barn and they were tethered to the hitching post. Murdoch went over to them. The mare turned her head to look at him and he patted her neck.

"What a piece of work we men are, my girl. But you don't care, do you? You just want some mash and a warm stall." She tossed her head.

As for him, he felt sick at heart with the awareness of how much pain human beings were capable of inflicting on each other. He, too, wanted to get home as soon as he could. He needed some evidence that love could have as much power as hatred.

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LET LOOSE THE DOGS

A Murdoch Mystery

Maureen Jennings



MCCLELLAND & STEWART

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Let Loose *the* Dogs



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Author's Note

Acknowledgements

For Iden, as always

And Caesar's spirit, ranging for revenge,
Shall in these confines with a monarch's voice
Cry "Havoc," and let slip the dogs of war;
That this foul deed shall smell above the earth ...

— from William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*

AUGUST 1895



Chapter One

HE REMEMBERED THE MATCH VIVIDLY . After that-after he had fallen by the bridge - he had no recall and only knew what had happened from the statements of witnesses at his trial. The day had been oppressively hot, the sky heavy and dark with a threatening storm. Inside the barn it was stifling, the air thick with the smell of blood and the stink of the rats. The dogs were going wild. Tripper, the innkeeper's black-and-tan bitch; the two white pugs that belonged to the Craigs; and a squat, brindle bulldog, who was there for the first time, were all tethered to the rings that ran along the wall. All of them were barking nonstop, their eyes dilated, saliva flooding from their mouths. He had shouted with the others all through the matches. They all had, even the Englishman who made such a point of being unruffled. Delaney had Flash in his arms and was having a hard time holding on to him, he was squirming so much, wanting to get back into the ring. Everybody knew this terrier had won unless Havoc got more kills. The stakes were high as they always were at Newcombe's matches, and Harry had put down a lot of money, every dime of what he'd saved over the summer. He was glad he'd drawn the last run because the later dogs were always more ferocious.

"Havoc up! Last dog. Flash the one to beat with forty kills," Lacey, the ring-keeper, called out. He released a cage of rats into the pit. They were dull brownish grey and fat from their summer feeding. At first they stayed close together, noses twitching, dazzled by the light. Lacey stirred them up with his crooked stick, then he shouted again.

"NOW! LET LOOSE YOUR DOG."

Harry dropped Havoc into the ring. Immediately the terrier pounced on three rats in succession, killing each one with a single bite and a violent shake that broke their necks. The rest started to run, circling the small walled pit. Some tried in vain to climb up the smooth sides. For the next, long ten minutes the dog pursued them, biting, shaking, and dropping one after the other. The men took up the count, calling out the number of hits.

"TWENTY-TWO ... TWENTY-THREE ... TWENTY-FOUR ..."

One of the rats twisted up and gripped the dog on the nose with its razor teeth, but Havoc wasn't deterred, running on until finally he slammed against the wall crushing the creature and it dropped to the floor. Several of the other rats tried to huddle in a corner, but Lacey banged on the side of the pit wall to get them going. The terrier killed all of them. The chant got faster, driving him on. His muzzle was crimson, his coat flecked with blood and spittle.

"THIRTY ... THIRTY-ONE ..."

Briefly, the little dog seized one of the corpses.

"Dead un! Leave it!" yelled Harry, and Havoc obeyed. The brown-and-white feist that belonged to White almost broke his leash in his attempts to get over to the ring. As if sensing what was at stake, all of the other dogs grew more frantic and shrill until it was hard to hear anything at all.

"... THIRTY-SIX ..."

The dog captured another one, almost tossing it out of the ring.

"... THIRTY-SEVEN."

Lacey was watching his big brass clock, which was on the ledge where everybody could see it. His hand was at the ready, clutching the rod to strike the gong beside him.

Suddenly the terrier stopped, panting hard. He looked toward the ring of spectators. Harry yelled.

"Go on ... Get 'em. Go on!" But the dog didn't move.

"TIME!" Lacey sounded the gong. The match was over.

"Pick up your dog," he called out.

"It was a cheat. My dog was stopped. We could have won."

"Please pick up your dog now, sir," repeated Lacey.

"Don't be a sore loser, Harry. It was fair and square," said Delaney, who was across from him.

Harry turned on him in fury. "You're a cheating liar. You did something, I know it. We could have won."

He reached over into the pit and snatched up Havoc, who yelped at the roughness of his grip. Normally Harry would have felt bad at hurting the dog, but now he was too angry to care and he thrust him into the wooden carrying box.

Newcombe, who always had his eye out for trouble, who was always pouring oil on boiling water, came over to him. "Now then, don't take on so. It was a fair match. Your dog got himself distracted. It's happened to us all at some time or other."

He tried to place an arm on Harry's shoulder to placate him, but Harry would have none of it.

"It suits you to say that, Vince Newcombe." He pointed accusingly at Lacey. "I had more time due to me. He cheated. I'll wager he's getting a cut of the take."

The timekeeper shrugged but said nothing.

Again, Newcombe tried to soothe. "Walter's honest as they come and never makes a mistake. Come on, let me stand you an ale. The match was won fair and square."

"I don't believe that. Those rats looked half asleep to me. You probably smoked them."

The innkeeper wiped at his face. He was a living replica of the old-time monks, with his bald head and round belly. "Why would I do that? It's all the same to me who wins."

"Not if he gives you a cut, it isn't."

The man, Pugh, who had been running the bulldog, spoke up. He'd come on his wheel, dressed for it in a bicycle suit of brown tweed and matching cap. His beige leggings were stained with blood and dirt. His dog was useless, more

afraid of the rats than they were of him. Pugh was as garrulous as a jackdaw.

"You lost, sir. Your dog balked. Nobody was cheating you. Take your lumps and stop whingeing."

Delaney started to approach his opponent. "You've got a game little lad, there, Harry. It was a good match. Why don't we shake on it like gentlemen."

He held out his hand. However, Harry turned away and spat on the dirt floor. "Hell will freeze over before I kiss the arse of liars and cheats."

For a moment, everything hung in the balance, and they all knew it. Out of the corner of his eye, Harry saw that Lacey's hand was on the handle of the water bucket ready to douse them both if need be.

"Tell me how I cheated you," said Delaney.

"You made some kind of sound. Something, I could tell the way he looked over. You've got a whistle I bet."

Delaney abruptly turned out all of his pockets, jacket and trousers. Harry thought they hung down like hounds' ears.

"Nothing, see. Will you be satisfied now?"

At this point, his son moved in closer. He was big like his father but smooth chinned and soft faced. For a moment, Harry thought he'd have to take on both of them, but then he saw that the boy was afraid and needed to take comfort from his father rather than defend him.

"He's not going to buff down for you, Harry," said Pugh. "Leave it now."

There were three other competitors in the barn. The Englishman, Craig, was the oldest man present. He looked ridiculously out of place in his suit of fine grey tweed, as if he should be in church rather than in a barn spattered with blood. He spoke up in an English accent as impeccable as his clothes.

"Mr. Newcombe, this has been a most exciting evening, but it is damnably hot in here. I suggest we Corinthians

settle our bets and all get on home before the storm breaks.”

Harry glared at him. “You’re so eager to finish up here, aren’t you? I wouldn’t be surprised if you’re not in on it as well.”

Even to his own ears, his words sounded slurred. He’d lost count of how many glasses of ale he’d tossed back, although he knew Lacey was keeping a close reckoning. Craig flicked at his moustache, which was waxed to such a thin point you’d think he’d be afraid of stabbing himself.

“It might be a good idea for you to cool off outside yourself, sir.”

Lacey made a slight movement, making it clear he was ready to assist if need be. James Craig stepped over, but unlike Philip Delaney, he was obviously ready to stand with his father. White wasn’t saying anything and didn’t look as if he would give any fight. Harry looked around at all of them, spat again, and picking up the box where he had put his dog, he left.

Outside the coming storm had overwhelmed any light still lingering. He saw the lightning flash, and from habit learned at sea, he counted until he heard a crack of thunder. The storm was nearly here. He hesitated but he was consumed with thoughts of revenge: all his money gone, stolen from him. He turned toward the end of the road and the path that led down into the ravine, Delaney’s path home.

It was darker as he descended, the trees thick and lush with leaves. He was about to cross the bridge at the bottom of the path, but he misjudged his step and tripped, striking his cheek hard against the railing. Cursing, he staggered further along, but he was too full of liquor and fell to the ground. Havoc barked at being jolted, but Harry had to find a place to rest. He crawled into the dense grass that was at the side of the path and lay down.

That was all he remembered.

December 1895



Chapter Two

COUNTY OF YORK ASSIZES.
JUSTICE FALCONBRIDGE PRESIDING.
DECEMBER 2, 1895.

STATEMENT OF SWORN WITNESS ,
PATRICK PUGH, BOOK AGENT .

MR. GREENE, Q.C .: Mr. Pugh, will you tell the gentlemen of the jury, in your own words, what happened the night of August 4, 1895.

PUGH: Yes, sir. After the ratting match, I went over to the taproom with Mr. Newcombe, who is the publican of the Manchester tavern. I sat chinning with him until about ten o'clock when there was a pounding on the door ...

MR. GREENE : One moment, Mr. Pugh. Even though the other witnesses will be giving their statements, it will assist the jurymen if you tell us what you recall about the movements of the other participants in the so-called match.

PUGH : Movements?

GREENE : What time did so and so leave for instance and with whom?

PUGH : Right! The first so and so to leave was the accused ...

(laughter)

JUSTICE FALCONBRIDGE : Mr. Pugh, this is a court of law. I will not tolerate such levity. I am inclined to charge you with contempt of court.

PUGH : I beg your pardon, Your Honour, I was being literal. But as I was saying, the accused left first about half past

seven or twenty minutes to eight. There was bad blood between him and the victim on account of he felt John Delaney had cheated him. In my opinion this was not the case, but he wouldn't listen. After he'd gone, we settled up our wagers. Walter Lacey had totted them up so that was soon done. I myself was only paying out, not receiving, but with the exception of me and the accused, the others won something, even Mr. White. Not that he took in much, one dollar I believe ...

JUSTICE FALCONBRIDGE : Will you come to the point, Mr. Pugh. We don't have all day to decide this case. I would like to go home for Christmas.

(laughter)

PUGH : I beg your pardon, Your Honour. Mr. Greene said I should use my own words, and there always seems to be a lot of them.

(laughter)

Sorry, sir. I wasn't intending to be funny. Where was I? That's all right, Mr. Greene, I remember. After the accused left, John Delaney followed. No wait, I tell a lie. He sent his son, Philip, off home first, then he collected his winnings, put them in his leather pouch, and left. He had won almost one hundred dollars. Shortly after, the Craigs and Mr. White left together.

GREENE : How soon after Mr. Delaney was that?

PUGH : I can't say exactly because I wasn't looking at the clock, not realising it would be important four months later ... but my guess is it was no more than ten minutes or so. There was a threat of a storm brewing, and everybody wanted to get home before it broke. We didn't realise a storm was coming, in more ways than one ...

JUSTICE FALCONBRIDGE : Mr. Pugh!

PUGH : My apologies, Your Honour. After they had gone, Mr. Newcombe suggested we move over to the taproom where

it was more comfortable, which we did, leaving Walter Lacey to clean the barn. We were together in each other's sight for the rest of the evening until young Philip Delaney arrived saying his pa had not come home.

GREENE : One moment, Mr. Pugh. You said you and Mr. Newcombe were in each other's sight the rest of the evening, by my calculation a period of about two hours. Did either of you leave the taproom at any time, however briefly, even to – excuse me, Your Honour – even to make water in the outside privy?

PUGH : I did, in fact, go out once to do just that. About nine o'clock. The clock was chiming. When I went outside I mean, not while I was ...

(laughter)

JUSTICE FALCONBRIDGE : Mr. Pugh, this is a last warning.

PUGH : Yes, sir. I was truly not trying to be funny. I am a literal man.

GREENE : So you are telling the court that except for a period of approximately ten minutes, you and Mr. Newcombe can vouch for each other?

PUGH : That is correct. He only left my sight just after I returned from the privy because Walter Lacey's wife and child had come in search of Maria. The babe was ill, and Mrs. Newcombe is well known in the neighbourhood for her nursing abilities. But Vincent was gone for only four or five minutes at the most while he made sure the situation wasn't serious, which it turned out not to be. The sick child, I mean ...

GREENE : Please be so good as to inform the gentlemen of the jury how long it would take to go into the ravine and back.

PUGH : That depends on whether you are a tortoise or a hare sort of person. A normal man or sturdy woman, walking at a normal pace, could go down and back in about twenty minutes at the most. Down to the bridge I mean, which is

where I found Delaney. You could run it faster I suppose, but the hill is steep so unless you were an Indian you would be panting pretty hard by the time you returned. What I am saying is that Mr. Newcombe was not at all breathless when he rejoined me in the taproom. We sat and chinned some more. Mostly about dogs, of which he knows a lot. The clock was chiming again, this time striking out a quarter past the hour of ten o'clock. It has a funny sort of wheeze to it so it draws attention to itself, which is why I noticed so particularly. We heard Philip at the door, as I've already told you. No offence, but he's a bit childish in his mind, and he was upset at his pa's absence. I didn't think there could be anything amiss. If we laid all the men end to end who've avoided going straight home after an afternoon at a betting match, the line would stretch down to the lake I'm sure. However, I said I'd walk back with him and take a look. I borrowed Vincent's lantern and set off. The rain had stopped, but the leaves and ground were soaked so we got wet just walking down the path. There's a little wooden bridge at the bottom of the path that spans the creek. Just past it, the path forks. One path runs up the hill to the Delaney house, the other follows the creek all the way through to Yonge Street. Philip said he was sure his father wasn't anywhere along the path to their house, so I said, "Let's take a look along here then." In the back of my mind, I thought maybe Mr. Delaney had laid down for a little kip ...

GREENE : Had he been drinking liquor during the match?

PUGH : I wasn't paying much attention. Mr. Lacey was constantly bringing us refills, which he kept good track of, I might add. To my mind, Mr. Delaney wasn't inebriated in the same way as the accused obviously was, but he may have had enough to make him want to lie down. I expected to find him fast asleep under a tree. Well, not too far down the path, oh about one hundred yards, I'd say, the light glinted on something pale floating in the creek. It was Mr. Delaney.

He had got wedged in the rocks, he was on his back, and his hair and beard were flowing out like weeds all around his head. I say this because it is relevant, Your Honour. I did think at once he was dead. However, I have studied resuscitation of drowned persons, and I could but try to revive him. I put down my lantern and was about to jump down the bank into the water. At this point two things occurred. The grey terrier, Havoc, came rushing at me out of the bushes. He's small but a fierce little thing, and he grabs hold of my trousers. I'm telling Philip to take hold of the cur, and he's standing on the edge of the bank wailing that his father is dead. "No, he's not," says I. "Come and help me pull him out." But he was incapable, so I spoke to him real sharp and told him to run as fast as he could to the tavern and fetch Mr. Newcombe. He did that, but the dog was still worrying at me till I had to kick it and he ran off. I slid down the bank and managed to pull on Mr. Delaney's arm to bring him to the strip of sand that was at the verge. There I rolled him over onto his stomach preparatory to doing resuscitation, but as soon as I did, I could see terrible gashes in the back of his head. Deep, terrible gashes they were, to the point that I could see bone and brain. Turned my stomach. I thought I'd better leave him there until we could get a coroner to come take a look. I made sure he wasn't going to be pulled back into the water and climbed back up the bank. I could hear the dog yipping away from somewhere down the path and decided to see what he was going on about. To tell you the truth, Your Honour, I was already doubting that Mr. Delaney had met with an accident. There aren't any sharp rocks on the banks or even in the creek itself. Those wounds looked to me like they'd come from somebody bashing him from behind. I went to investigate the dog. I could see where the grass was flattened down a bit off to the north side of the path, and the terrier was in there. I went in only a matter of a few feet and came across the accused, who was lying on his side

against a tree. The dog was barking and pawing at him, and for a minute I wondered if I was going to be encountering another corpse because he wasn't moving. But I brought the lantern up right close, and he stirred and then opened his eyes. I noticed he had an abrasion on his right cheek just below his eye. "What's a matter?" he asked, all slurred. "John Delaney's dead," I replied. I didn't say anything about an accident or how he was dead, I just said, "John Delaney's dead." That seemed to wake him up. "Well, he got what he deserved, didn't he?"

GREENE : You are sure those were his exact words?

PUGH : To the letter. "He got what he deserved."

GREENE : Did you reply?

PUGH : I did. I realise my words were not charitable or Christian, but I was shocked by how callous he was. I said, "Then I hope you, too, get what you deserve, Harry Murdoch."

END OF WITNESS STATEMENT .

Chapter Three

ALTHOUGH HE COULDN 'T QUITE ADMIT to himself that he was actually *hiding* the book from his landlady, William Murdoch had tucked it discreetly to the back of his small bookcase in his tiny sitting room. Mrs. Kitchen cleaned in here once a week, and although he knew her interest in him came from affection and concern, he felt too shy about certain matters to reveal them even to her. He'd found the little book titled *Our Bodily Dwelling* in Caversham's bookshop and bought it hoping he could gain some knowledge. So far it had yielded little. The female author had used the metaphor of a house to describe the various bodily functions. He'd turned straight to the chapter called "Plumbing," hoping it was what he needed, but it turned out to be only about the bowels and nothing so far about private parts, although he thought they could be considered a kind of plumbing. He skimmed through to "Questionable Guests," but this turned out to be a long diatribe against alcohol. Murdoch sighed and flipped the pages to the next chapter. He by no means espoused temperance and saw nothing wrong with moderate imbibing. In the summer, after he'd pushed his body to the limit on one of his long bicycle rides, he liked nothing better than a pint or two of cool beer or cider. The authoress was vehemently against nicotine and smoking, so that was of no interest either. He was enjoying his pipe before retiring for the night. Frustrated, he tossed the book to the floor. He was so woefully ignorant about almost everything pertaining to intimate connections, but he really didn't know where to turn. What he'd heard from the rough-and-ready lumberjacks when he was at the camp he didn't

think applied to decent women. In their all too short time together, he and Liza hadn't really talked much about it either, although he considered she was bolder than he was.

He yawned and pulled his flannel dressing gown tighter. Shortly after he'd come to live with the Kitchens, he'd asked if he could rent this room as his sitting room. He couldn't really afford to, his wages were modest to say the least, but he liked having the extra space and he knew it helped his landlady out. Because he insisted on paying for his own coal, a fire in a second grate meant still more cost, so he often didn't bother to light it. Tonight he had wanted the comfort of a fire, but it had died down and he wasn't about to build it up this close to bedtime. He knocked the ashes out of his pipe on the grate, gave the embers a quick rake with the poker, and picking up his candlestick went over to the window.

The street below was moonlit, quiet, and peaceful as a painting in a Christmas card. Yesterday there had been a light snowfall. Not heavy or with staying power but a warning of what was ahead, and some snow remained on the rooftops and in the clefts of the tree branches. This was going to be his second Christmas without Liza, and he felt such a pang of loneliness he had to move to keep the pain at bay. Forget about sleep right now. He knew he'd just be tossing around for the next two or three hours. He walked over to the brass box by the fire. It was supposed to be used for firewood, but he kept his dancing shoes in it. They were fancy, two-toned black and white, with an elasticised sidepiece and soft, flexible soles. He took them out, kicked off his slippers, and pushed his bare feet into the shoes. Whenever he put them on he felt different. He fancied his back straightened, his steps got smoother, and his shyness disappeared.

Last evening when he had sat with the Kitchens in the front parlour, Mrs. Kitchen had reminded him about his

dancing lessons. "You should take them up again, Mr. Murdoch. You were doing so well."

Earlier in the year, he had enrolled in dance classes at the studio of one Professor Otranto. The name was far too exotic for the vain, portly little man from Liverpool, but he was a competent teacher and Murdoch had begun to enjoy himself. His waltz was coming along nicely, and he'd learned a two-step and something called the Palais Glide. However, he hadn't taken a lesson for a while.

Mrs. Kitchen wouldn't let the matter rest. "It's such a pleasant way to spend an evening. Better than staying here with us old pair night after night." What she meant was that it was time to get on with things. Liza had been dead for more than a year now. It was time to find himself a suitable sweetheart and stop moping. Murdoch sighed. She was right of course. Until recently, his thoughts had been definitely moving in that direction. He'd found himself strongly attracted to Mrs. Enid Jones, a young widow from Wales who was also a boarder in the house. Unfortunately, she was Baptist and he was Roman Catholic, and therein was a huge problem. He was willing to continue, but she wasn't and she had moved out.

Murdoch straightened up. The clock on the mantelpiece began to strike eleven. He'd better get a move on. He rolled back the rag rug, pushed his armchair to the wall, and took up a position in the centre of the small space he'd created. *Right arm up, shoulder level, bend the elbow, turn the palm in, placed at the midline of the lady's back. Firm but gentle command. Now, left arm raised, thumb spread out, ready to receive her gloved, dainty hand*. Whose hand? Never mind, keep going.

"All right. Mrs. Jones, may I have the honour of this dance?"

With a slight dip, he slid his right foot forward. Immediately, he could hear Professor Otranto's voice. "Chin up, Mr. Murdoch! This is not a boxing match!" His dance

teacher was fond of declamatory expressions. "Glide! Don't stamp. You are not destroying cockroaches. Chin up, shoulders back. You are a proud soldier! Think of being a soldier!"

Forward, two, three. Back, two, three. Murdoch managed three pivots in a row. As long as his partner's skirt didn't get underfoot as it so easily could, the reverse turn was an elegant manoeuvre.

He came too close to the fender and he stumbled on a forward dip, aware he would have just tromped on his partner's slippers.

He stopped. There was somebody knocking on the front door. Who on earth could it be at this time of night? Before he could take action, he heard the sound of Mrs. Kitchen going to answer. A male voice spoke briefly, but he couldn't make out the words. Then Mrs. Kitchen started up the stairs. There was an urgency in her steps that made him hurry.

"I'm in here, Mrs. K.," he called and opened the door, taking care to keep his bare shanks out of sight.

Beatrice Kitchen came onto the landing, her candle held aloft. She had a dressing robe on over her nightgown, and her fine grey hair was in a long braid down her back.

"Oh, Mr. Murdoch, a constable has just come from the station." She handed him a piece of paper. "He brought this telegram for you."

Murdoch unfolded the paper, and she brought the candle closer so he could see.

To: Acting Detective William Murdoch.

Message: We regret to inform you that our beloved sister, Philomena of the Sacred Heart, has become gravely ill. We recommend that you attend her as soon as possible.

The telegram operator's handwriting wasn't very legible, and on the line that indicated the sender, he'd written something indecipherable so that, in a moment of

confusion, Murdoch read only the word "Mother." It was so long since he had heard Susanna referred to by her religious name, he didn't realise at first to whom they were referring. Then he did.

"Oh dear, is it bad news, Mr. Murdoch?" Mrs. Kitchen was regarding him anxiously.

"I'm afraid it is. It seems that my sister is dying."

All three of them were in the front parlour. Mrs. Kitchen had insisted on making Murdoch a mug of warm milk and brandy, and he was sipping it gratefully. Arthur was beside him in his invalid's bath chair, drinking the scalding hot water that was one more in the long list of recommended treatments for consumption that his wife was always finding.

Murdoch had sent the constable back with an answering telegraph message that he would take the nine o'clock train to Montreal the next morning. There was nothing else he could do until then, but he was glad for the company of his friends. Beatrice, who never stopped working at something, was making chains of coloured tissue paper for Christmas decorations. Arthur seemed a little better than usual tonight, and it was he who had particularly drawn Murdoch out, inviting him to talk about Susanna. The hot brandy loosened his tongue, and he found himself babbling on without reservation.

"I still remember the day she was born. In fact, her birthday is only three days from now, December twelfth. She will be thirty-one years old." He paused, conscious of all their thoughts. She might not reach that age.

"Go on," prompted Arthur. "You remember ..."

"I was little more than three years old. My father woke me up. I still had a cot in their bedroom. He said I was going to spend the night at Mrs. Swann's house, the neighbour at the end of the lane. He picked me up, wrapped me in a shawl,

and carried me downstairs. Momma was walking up and down by the window. She was making a funny gasping sound. She hardly looked at me, just said, 'Don't fuss. Be a good boy, Willie.' I was frightened out of my skin. Something was dreadfully wrong. My father was stern as usual, but I risked asking him what was the matter with Momma. 'Nothing's wrong. A little brother or sister is coming tonight.'"

Murdoch chuckled. "'Where from?' I asked him. Charlie Swann had a little brother, and Joshua Rupp had two young sisters. Was it them who were coming over?"

"What did your father answer?" asked Arthur. His wife glanced at him. This was not quite a proper conversation to be having.

"I don't remember if he said anything. He handed me over to Mrs. Swann and left. I gave that good woman a hard time as I recall. I refused to go to bed and stood at the window waiting for Poppa to come back. I was sure I saw black plumed horses coming down the lane the way they had for Mr. Tauton's funeral. I was convinced my mother would die."

Mrs. Kitchen clucked sympathetically. "Poor mite. Children do get such fancies in their heads."

"In spite of everything, I must have fallen asleep because the next I knew it was daylight, and there was my father again. He seemed happy and excited. 'Come on, we've got a surprise for you.' He picked me up again and rushed me down the lane back to our house."

Murdoch paused. His cheek had been pressed against his father's chest. Harry was wearing his thick fisherman's sweater, and the smell was strong: tobacco, fish, something sweaty and masculine. The jolting was uncomfortable, and he was unused to being carried by his father. But there was a comfort in the strength of his arms that he had never forgotten. The rare mood of happiness was sweet.

"My momma was lying in bed. One of the women from the shore was standing beside her. They were both staring down

at a funny little creature in a cradle next to the bed. To me it looked like a bundle of cloth wrapped around a red face. The eyes were squeezed shut, but the mouth was moving. My mother smiled at me. 'This is your new little sister, Willie. Come and give her a kiss.' Momma seemed so happy, and I was stabbed by a terrible pang of jealousy. Right here." He indicated his solar plexus. "'Where did she come from?' I asked. 'From up above,' said my mother. She raised her eyes heavenward, and I thought she was indicating the corner of the ceiling. I couldn't understand how the newcomer had managed that and thought Momma must have meant she had come down the chimney. 'When's she going back?' I asked. They all laughed, even my father. Nobody understood how sincere I was."

"That's only natural," said Beatrice. "If the first child is a boy, he always considers himself a little prince."

There was a wistful expression on her face, and Murdoch remembered that she'd told him she had lost three children, two infants but the one boy had lived until he was two. He hesitated, not sure whether or not he should change the subject. Beatrice nodded at him. "Do go on."

"As Susanna grew up, we became the best of friends. I suppose we had our squabbles, but mostly she was my steadfast companion. I'm afraid it's true what you say, Mrs. K. She was always willing to be the ship's crew, while I was the captain."

Suddenly he felt uneasy. Was it true she had always been willing, or had he, in fact, bullied her into complying?

"She has been a nun for a long time. I believe you mentioned that."

Murdoch nodded. "She was a postulant when she was just sixteen."

He didn't want to upset Mrs. Kitchen by revealing how angry he'd been when Susanna told him what she intended to do. She had chosen a cloistered order, and he knew he would never see her again except from behind a curtained

grille. No priest could talk him out of his bitterness at her being lost to him and all normal life forever.

"It is unfortunate the prioress didn't tell you the nature of your sister's illness," said Arthur. "It is not out of the question that she will recover."

Murdoch didn't reply. "Gravely ill," were the same words that the doctor had used about Liza. She had been taken ill so suddenly. He didn't know, wasn't expecting to see her until Sunday. On Friday her father had sent a message to the station. "You should come at once; Elizabeth has typhoid fever." She had died that night, without good-byes or consciousness. He did not have much hope for Susanna. He sipped the warm drink, hoping his friends hadn't noticed his eyes had filled with tears.

Chapter Four

JEREMIAH BARKER LIKED THIS PERIOD of his turn of duty. The majority of prisoners were in the shops working. The few who had to remain in their cells were usually easy enough to keep an eye on. This afternoon he only had three charges. One was an old, destitute man who was too infirm to work at all. Lost in a world where time had disappeared, he lay on his cot all day, waiting to be transferred to the House of Providence. He was so scrofulous, Barker knew the cell would have to be completely disinfected when he went. More work. The other two prisoners were both on the second level. Lawson, the younger one, had received ten stripes two days ago, and he was excused from work. Barker had scant sympathy for him. He was a sly fellow with a look about him that made you never want to turn your back.

The third man was in the cell at the end of the row. He was a convicted murderer. He had been sentenced to hang; and as that was about to happen in a week's time, there seemed no point in training him in any of the prison workshops. For him, Barker had some compassion. He never gave any trouble and spent his days doing his sketches or just lying on his cot, staring at the ceiling. When asked what he was contemplating, he'd replied, "Just my life, sir. Nothing else but that." Usually the prisoners facing death were kept isolated in a special section of the jail that overlooked the exercise yard, but he was here because the last inhabitant of the death cell had died from typhoid and they didn't want another convict to cheat justice. The guards were not supposed to talk to the prisoners, but often loneliness on both sides overrode that rule. Since August

Barker had had many a quiet chat with his charge. Initially, he'd suffered from withdrawal from liquor, but the longer his sobriety, the more he expressed regret at his previous way of life. Not that he admitted to his crime of murder. Innocent of that he was. They all said that though. Prior to his conviction, he had apparently been a lapsed Roman Catholic, but the shock of the death sentence had sent him back full speed to the fold. The priest, Fr. Healy, visited him twice a week and was happy with his progress. Jeremiah was a pious man himself, although of the Methodist persuasion, and he was always glad to see a man turn to God, even if it was the papist heresy the penitent embraced.

This afternoon Barker had managed to get a bit of a sit down at the table by the entrance door. His legs weren't as young as they used to be, and the constant patrolling along the iron walks, up and down the staircase, had taken its toll. He yawned and scratched a varicose vein on the back of his leg. It was a dreary afternoon, and the gloom of the cell block was deepening. The light filtering down through the central skylight was grey and sombre, threatening snow. It was only on Sundays when there was no work and the men were in their cells that the warden allowed the gas sconces to be fully lit. Otherwise, on weekdays they stayed off until after the evening meal.

Right now Jeremiah could hardly see the third-floor cells above him. He shivered and hunkered down into the collar of his thick serge tunic. There were two big woodstoves in the centre of the cell block, but like the sconces, they were kept at a low burn during the afternoon. It was all very well to say that those who had broken the law should not be coddled; nobody seemed to consider that their keepers had to suffer as well. He would be glad to finish and get back to his own room in the guards' quarters.

There was the sound of a key clanking in the lock, and Barker stood up as quickly as he could, grunting a little at the stiffness in his back and legs. Mr. Massie himself

entered. He rarely came to inspect the cells at this time of day, and Barker felt a wiffle of alarm in his stomach. He hoped he wasn't in trouble. The warden, however, smiled benignly.

"Afternoon, Mr. Barker. Everything correct?"

"Yes, sir."

Massie indicated an envelope he was holding. "I have a letter for one of the prisoners. It's rather an unusual situation, so I thought I'd bring it to him now rather than wait until Sunday. Can I see your book."

"Yes, sir." Barker swivelled the big roll book around to face the warden.

"Good! He's in cell six. No points lost all week, I see."

"No, sir, he's an obedient fellow."

Massie jabbed his finger on the page. "This one, Lawson? How is he behaving?"

"He's complaining quite a lot, sir. He says he should be in the infirmary."

"Ha! I don't particularly like to see a man whipped, but he deserved it if ever a man did. If he continues whining, take away one of his privileges. Maybe going without dinner for three days will develop some conscience in the man."

"Yes, sir."

"Let's go then, shall we, Mr. Barker."

The guard picked up the lamp from the table and led the way. The warden halted and peered through the bars of the old man's cell.

"Hello, Mr. Dade, how are you this afternoon?"

There was no answer. Massie waited for a moment, then he said rather more loudly, "We'll have you out of here soon as a shake."

They moved on. "He's been most despondent, sir. Won't eat or drink anything," said the guard.

"Poor unfortunate fellow. He must be carrying at least seventy years on his back. He deserves to end his days in a little more comfort, don't you think?"

“Yes, sir,” replied Jeremiah, but he was not sincere. As far as he was concerned, if you ended up a pauper, it was your own fault or your own depravity that got you there.

They climbed up the spiral metal staircase to the second floor.

As they passed by Lawson’s cell, the prisoner came to the bars and reached out.

“Warden, have pity. I’m suffering real bad.”

Massie scowled at him. “You should have thought of that before you assaulted that poor woman. I’m sure she suffered, too.”

Jeremiah was glad he’d never been called upon to administer a whipping. He could be strict when it came to applying the rules but deliberately inflicting physical pain was another matter, and he knew he could never stomach it. He’d had to witness some of the whippings, and he hadn’t liked it at all. These punishments weren’t common anymore, but everybody was affected when they occurred. The prisoners were more likely to be restless and defiant, and the guards jumpy.

They proceeded on to the cell that was at the end of the row. The prisoner had heard them coming and was standing close to the bars, waiting.

“Good afternoon, Warden Massie ...” His voice was civil, but his eyes were wary, afraid to hope, unable not to.

“I’ve brought you a letter. I know you’ve been anxious for a reply, so I thought I’d give it to you at once.”

“Thank you, sir. I do appreciate that.”

“Shall I read it for you?”

“If you please.”

Massie took the letter out of the envelope and beckoned to the guard to bring the lamp closer.

Dear Sir. In reply forthwith to your letter of the second of September, '95, instance. I must first apologise for the delay in answering but it took a long time to reach us here and second we had no knowledge of the whereabouts

of the man you were enquiring after. As you had said it was a matter of some urgency, I did however send a messenger to enquire of one of our former cooks who is now permanently residing in the town of Huntsville to see if he had any information. As it turns out, he did and I have forthwith included what he related. Mr. William Murdoch esquire is now to be found in the city of Toronto. According to my informant, he is employed in the capacity of a detective police officer. I do hope this is of help to you.

I am your obedient servant, sir.

C. M. Ryan. Esquire, foreman, Apex logging and saw company,
Huntsville, Ontario.

Harry grasped the bars with both hands. "A police officer!"

Massie regarded him curiously. "I must admit to you, sir, that I did find the irony of the situation rather rare. And clearly this is a surprise to you."

"Yes, I should say it is. I have not heard from him for many years, close on twenty-two."

"He won't be too hard to find now. I will telephone the police headquarters and see if they know which station he is attached to."

"Thank you, sir. I would most appreciate that."

The warden hesitated. "Twenty-two years is a long time. What was the reason you lost contact?"

"Him and me had a bad falling out. Both of us as hotheaded as a gingered horse. And stubborn. He wouldn't call 'hold' and neither would I."

Massie leaned in closer. "You must be careful not to raise your hopes too high. He cannot reverse the decision of the court even if he is the chief of police himself."

The other man clenched his jaw. "I am innocent, Warden. And sure as I stand here, he will prove it." There was a glint of humour in his eyes. "You have to admit, sir, there's not many prisoners who get an opportunity like this. What more can I ask? A detective and my own son."

Chapter Five

THERE WAS ONLY ONE SMALL WINDOW in the infirmary, and the December afternoon light was already weak and fading. Votive candles flickered on stands at each corner of the bed where Sister Philomena lay dying, but they could not dispel the gloom. The room was chill, the fire in the grate meagre, as coal was apportioned out carefully even in the infirmary. The order was an austere one.

The three o'clock bell sounded, and Sister Genevieve, the infirmarian, knelt and kissed the floor then touched her crucifix to her lips as she had done at this hour every day for the past fifty years. She said a brief prayer and got stiffly to her feet. Sister Philomena opened her eyes. The bell had wakened her, or perhaps she wasn't sleeping, just lying as still as she could to withstand the pain. She raised her hand, indicating she wanted the crucifix that was on the pillow beside her. Sister Genevieve picked it up and held it for her to kiss. In the infirmary the rule of silence was waived if necessary, but there was no conversation between the two nuns. In the last weeks of her illness, Sister Philomena had reverted to her own language, and she seemed to have difficulty understanding the Quebec patois of her nurse. Sister Genevieve had no English.

Sister Philomena of the Sacred Heart of Jesus had been in the infirmary for almost a month now, each day weaker. Dr. Corneille, a good pious man who ministered to the sisters, was appalled when he saw the nun's condition. It was far too late, he said in his brusque way; he should have been called months ago. Mother St. Raphael had taken the rebuke as her due. The younger nun was in her charge. However,

Sister Genevieve knew all too well that Sister Philomena had hidden her illness until the tumour was starting to break through the skin. She had gone about her duties, never complaining, although she was suffering terribly. Even now, in spite of the entreaties of the infirmarian, she also refused to take morphine or opium to alleviate her pain. Her response was unchanging. "I must bear my pain as Our Lord bore His."

Sister Genevieve had asked Mother St. Raphael whether or not Sister Philomena of the Sacred Heart was perilously close to the sin of pride. However, the prioress was adamant. Their sister was withstanding the ravages of the cancer with the fortitude of the saints. They must all pray for her.

The infirmarian took the silver aspergillum from the bowl that was on the bedside table and sprinkled holy water on the bed. Sister Philomena opened her eyes and smiled at her.

"Thank you, Sister. I am so hot. Hell can hardly be worse than this."

Fortunately, Sister Genevieve, who lacked humour, did not understand these words. She picked up the clean linen bandages from the bedside table, preparing to change the dressing at the nun's breast. Sister Philomena could not keep back a moan of pain. As gently as she could, Sister Genevieve removed the soiled cloth, biting back her exclamation of pity. She had grown up on a farm before she entered the convent. Her father had hunted animals to provide the family with food, and she had seen these carcasses dumped on the kitchen floor. The breast of the dying nun looked as if it had been destroyed by a blast of shot.

She bathed the wound with more of the holy water. Sister Philomena was hardly breathing, holding her lips pressed tightly together to hold back her moan of pain. Finally Sister Genevieve replaced the bandage and pulled up the thin

blanket. Even its light weight seemed to cause pain, and she removed it at once.

Sister Philomena looked up at her. "Has my brother arrived yet?"

"Comment?"

"My brother" - she searched for the word - "*mon frere? Est-il arrive?*"

Sister Genevieve shook her head. This was at least the fourth time the other nun had asked this question. She seemed to have forgotten that according to his telegram, her brother was catching the first train from Toronto, and he wouldn't be arriving until early evening.

Sister Philomena was not yet of middle age, and although her face and limbs were emaciated, her brown eyes still had beauty. She was looking beseechingly at the older nun. In French, she said, "Please bring Mother St. Raphael to me." She brought her hands together on her chest. "There is something I must confess."

The nun pursed her lips. Sister Philomena had received the sacrament of Extreme Unction this morning with all of the little community present. Fr. Hiebert had heard her confession then. Surely she had not contaminated her soul in such a short space of time. Sister Genevieve did not want to fetch the prioress unnecessarily. She turned away, pretending not to understand. The other nun spoke again, her voice suddenly stronger.

"Please, I must talk to our Mother."

Genevieve was rescued from her dilemma by the entrance of the prioress herself.

Mother St. Raphael was a tall woman, rather harsh of feature, except for a mouth that outside of the cloister would have been considered sensuous. She went straight to the bedside and placed her hand on the sick woman's forehead.

"I am here, my child."

Sister Philomena licked her dry, chapped lips. "I am so thirsty, Mother."

Mother St. Raphael signalled to Sister Genevieve to hand her the sponge, and she squeezed some moisture into Sister Philomena's mouth then wiped her face gently.

She was eased a little. "When will my brother be here?"

The prioress sighed. "Monsieur Laval is meeting him at the train station, and he will bring him here at once. Not more than two or three hours from now." She spoke English that had only the slightest of French accent.

"Perhaps I will be in the arms of Our Lord by then."

"It is not for us to predict when we are garnered," said the prioress, but her reproof was soft.

Sister Philomena struggled to raise herself in the bed, but she couldn't and was forced to lie back.

"Shall we help you to sit up?"

"No, I cannot bear it. But there is something I must tell you. Will you come closer?"

Mother St. Raphael pulled the chair up against the bed and leaned her head toward the other nun. Sister Genevieve was busy folding the linen bandages.

"Mother, I have been wrestling with such dark thoughts. They are blotting out the light of Our Lord's face."

"These are mere scruples, my dear little sister. You have been absolved of all your sins. You are going on the journey to Our God with a soul that has been cleansed of sin." She stroked Sister Philomena's cheek.

The nun pressed the prioress's hand against her face.

"I know that my heart is still full of anger ..."

"For whom, my child? You have been ever one of our most loving sisters. What is this anger?"

Sister Philomena became more agitated. "For the past three days, I have looked up at the corner of the room, there where the ceiling and the wall join. There, do you see it? A spider. Oh, it is so big. I asked Sister Genevieve to chase it away, but it always returns. It does not move."

Involuntarily, Mother St. Raphael glanced up at the ceiling. The wall was whitewashed; and even though the light was dim, she could see nothing.

“Does this frighten you, my child?”

“At first yes, but now I see that our Saviour has sent it to me as a sign. There is a dark place in my soul. I must cleanse it before I die.”

She shifted restlessly, but the movement made her whimper. Mother St. Raphael waited patiently. When she spoke next, Sister Philomena’s voice was so low she was almost inaudible.

“I have hidden it even from my confessor. The Lord our God commands us to love and honour our father and our mother, but I do not.”

The prioress was surprised at what she heard. Sister Philomena had said so little about her life before she entered the convent as a postulant. She’d understood she had no family except for the one brother, older than she was. He had visited two times in the beginning but not for many years now.

“I led you to believe that both of my parents were dead, but that was not true.” She licked at her lips. “My mother was deceased, but my father was alive when I became a postulant.” She stopped. “It is he whom I reject in my heart. In spite of the words of Our Saviour, I can find no love for my father. I must not go to Our Lord’s house with such uncharitable thoughts.”

She was almost exhausted with the effort of talking, and Mother St. Raphael had to lean closer to hear what she said.

“What is your father’s sin that you cannot honour him?”

But the nun was distracted. She glanced upward. “Perhaps the spider has come to remind me of my shame.”

Mother St. Raphael stood up. “I will send for our father confessor once more if it will bring you peace. But you must not fret so. We are all only frail mortals. Our Lord sees everything and is ever merciful.”

She could not tell if her words had reached Sister Philomena because she had closed her eyes again. The prioress turned to the infirmarian and spoke to her in French. "Sister Genevieve, burn another stick of incense if you please and bring it close to the bedside. It will give her strength."

She left the room with a soft rustling of her habit on the wooden floorboards.

Sister Genevieve took a strip of the linen and carefully wiped away the moisture from Sister Philomena's forehead. She wrapped that piece in a separate strip and put it on the table. If Sister Philomena of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was truly a saint, this cloth would be a holy relic.

Chapter Six

THE INFIRMARY WAS IN A LOW , single-storey wing off the east side of the main convent. An arched, covered walkway ran the length of the building, the openings small and high. In front of that was a row of hemlocks. The snow was smooth and deep as far as the trees. No shrubs poked up, no mark of human activity. At a different season, the courtyard might have appeared tranquil, but today, in the winter night, the sombre dark stone of the convent walls seemed bleak and desolate.

At the end of the path, almost hidden by the evergreens, there was a narrow door. As Murdoch and the driver of the sleigh that had brought him from the station approached, it opened and a nun beckoned them in. "Bonjour, Monsieur. I am Sister Agnes. I regret we meet under such sorrowing circumstances."

With a tip of his cap to Murdoch, the driver tromped off the way they had come.

"He will bring your valise," Sister Agnes said to Murdoch. She hesitated. "You may stay as long as you wish. Our accommodation is very simple but, I hope, adequate."

They were standing in an anteroom devoid of furnishings, with an uncovered flagstone floor and whitewashed stone walls. The extern had a lamp but the wick was turned low, and where they were was dim and so cold he could see his own breath white on the air.

"When can I see my sister?"

The nun glanced away. "I regret that according to our rule you will not be able to see her in person."

Murdoch was well aware of the rule, but he wanted to defy it, to vent his anger on the women who applied it so rigidly.

"Surely you can make an exception in this case?"

"I regret, Monsieur, that is for our Mother to decide. However, we have arranged to have our sister brought to the infirmary parlour. She is very weak, but it is possible you can speak to her."

She turned and opened another door behind her, and he followed her into a narrow corridor, like the anteroom uncarpeted and bare. Their footsteps rang on the stone floor. She unlocked yet another door and ushered him into a small room.

"Please be seated, Mr. Murdoch. I will be but a moment."

The parlour contained only three straight-backed chairs and a low table. A single candle burned in a wall sconce, underneath which was a brass crucifix that shone with a dull, ruddy gleam in the candlelight. On the other side, a text was written on the white wall: I AM THE WAY AND THE LIFE SAID THE LORD . To the left of this was what appeared to be a small window covered by a square of plain grey felt. The floor was flagstone, but a hemp carpet was a concession to comfort. There was a fire in the hearth, but it was banked down to the point almost of extinction.

Murdoch took off his hat but decided it was far too cold to remove his coat. He went over to the fireplace. There was no poker or coalbox, so he had to kick at the coal to get more of a blaze going. He warmed his hands and waited. There was absolute silence all around him.

It seemed a long time before the extern returned. There was a smell of incense on her clothes. She addressed a point over his right shoulder.

"I must tell you our sister is in a state of severe suffering," she said. "I beg you not to tire her or distress her unnecessarily."

He was on the verge of making a sarcastic retort, but he bit it back when he saw that, beneath her pious detachment, she was grieved.

"You realise, Sister, I have no knowledge of the nature of her illness."

"She has a tumour. Unfortunately, she did not inform Reverend Mother that she was ill until the disease was quite advanced."

Her tone was somewhat defensive as if she expected he would hold the prioress responsible for neglect of her duty. He didn't. Susanna was always that way. Ever since he had known her, she had hidden her pain or sickness, never complaining. It frustrated him and sometimes he would tease her unmercifully. Once he twisted her finger, trying to force her to cry out. She wouldn't, and he'd stopped, thoroughly ashamed of himself.

He heard sounds of movement from the adjoining room, and there was a light tapping on the wall. Sister Agnes drew back the piece of felt. It wasn't covering a window but a metal grille about three feet square.

"You can come closer, Mr. Murdoch."

He did so and could look through the grille into the adjoining room. However, a second piece of black material was hung across the opening, and he could barely make out two shadowy figures in nun's garb. He heard, rather than saw, that the far door opened and somebody came into the room carrying an oil lamp. This light made the black curtain less opaque and he could see that a narrow bed was being wheeled into the room. He assumed the person lying in the bed was Susanna, but everything was too dim to see her face distinctly.

Sister Agnes had brought a candle with her, and she lit it from the one in the sconce and brought it close to the grille. He realised this was so that, in like fashion, his sister could see his silhouette.

"You can speak to her, Mr. Murdoch. She is conscious. She has been so anxious for your presence."

He leaned forward, straining to see Susanna better through the curtain. "Cissie, it's Will. I've come to visit you."

The words were absurd, he knew, but it was all he could do to talk at all. He heard her voice, barely audible.

"Will? You are here?"

"Yes, Cissie, I came as fast as I could."

More muttering and he had to press his ear against the grille to hear better. There was another voice, speaking in French. Sister Agnes translated.

"Our infirmarian, Sister Genevieve, says that Sister Philomena regrets that you have had to come so far, and she is unable to speak to you."

"That doesn't matter."

There was another exchange between Susanna and the infirmarian. His eyes were getting accustomed to the darkness, and he could see two nuns beside the bed. He realised they were trying to prop the dying woman up on her pillow. She groaned in pain, but they raised her sufficiently for her upper body to come closer to the grille. Susanna was wearing a white bed cap, and her face was as emaciated as a skeleton's. Her eye sockets were deeply shadowed, her cheeks sunken. He wanted to weep at the sight. He could see that she smiled. "Will, it is so good to see you."

"And you, my little sprat."

"There is something ... concern to me ... I have tried to let go of all earthly things.... I can see the light of Our Lord as it beckons to me." She had to stop and one of the nuns wiped her lips with a piece of linen. "Our Poppa ... you must speak to him, Will. He must ask for forgiveness."

He was surprised at what she said because Susanna had never joined him in his ranting about their father, never before acknowledged his many transgressions against his wife and children.

"We must cease for the moment, Mr. Murdoch," said Sister Agnes.

But Susanna whispered, "I would like it if you would stay awhile longer, Will."

"My dear, of course I won't leave."

He hadn't said, *until you die*, but that is what he meant.

It was obvious even through the impeding curtain that Susanna was in too much agony to remain sitting up, and the two nuns lowered her gently backward.

Murdoch stayed in the little austere cold parlour for the next few hours. Sister Agnes sat on a hard chair behind him and disappeared only once. She returned carrying a tray on which was a bowl of vegetable soup and a thick slice of bread. He was ravenous but his appetite vanished as soon as she placed the simple meal in front of him, and it was all he could do to swallow some of the hot broth. They had not moved the bed from the adjoining room, and twice more nuns entered and sang prayers. As far as he could tell, Susanna had fallen into unconsciousness. He didn't speak, and neither did any of the nuns. About midnight, in spite of the discomfort, he actually dozed off and was awakened by a soft tug on his sleeve.

"Monsieur Murdoch, our sister is failing rapidly. You may wish to say a prayer with us."

He stood up and peered through the grille. There were three or four nuns on the other side, and one of them was lighting votive candles at the foot of the bed, making it easier to see into the room. He could hear a harsh, gurgling kind of breathing. Susanna's mouth had fallen open. Within minutes the sound became quieter and finally ceased all together. She was dead.

Sister Agnes knelt down and crossed herself, and he could see the other two nuns were doing the same. He leaned his forehead against the cool metal grille, and the pungent

scent of the incense wafted across to him. When he was a boy he had gone to his church, and at the altar, he had made a vow to protect his mother, Susanna, and Bertie. He had been very solemn about it, and although he'd couched the promise in general terms, what he really meant was that he would defend them against his father's wrath. He had failed. Then his mother had died, drowned in a shallow pool among the rocks on the beach. Bertie, always sickly, lived only six more months after this, and Susanna had turned elsewhere for her protection. His vow had been useless. He had not been able to save her when they were children, and he was helpless now to assuage her suffering.

"Monsieur Murdoch, will you join me in prayer?" asked the extern.

"Yes, Sister."

He, too, crossed himself and dropped to his knees on the hard floor.

Chapter Seven

“GOOD EVENING , MRS. MC ISAAC .” Walter Lacey stamped off the snow from his boots. “Where’s Jessica?” He’d brought a waft of cold air into the cottage, and Mrs. Mclsaac made a point of pulling her shawl up closer around her neck. She was seated in the nook by the fireside, Sally asleep in the cradle in front of her.

“She said she was tired, and she’s gone up to bed.” Her disapproval was obvious.

Lacey took off his hat and coat and hung them on the hook behind the door. Mrs. Mclsaac was mending a shirt, and she put it aside. “You look perishing. I suppose you’ll be wanting some tea?”

He blew on his cold fingers. “That would be appreciated, ma’am.” He came closer to the fire and crouched down to look at his daughter. She insisted on sleeping in this crib even though she was too big for it and had to curl up to fit. He’d made the crib himself, an apple box, sanded down and painted bright yellow. Jess hadn’t wanted him to. “It’s unlucky to prepare too soon,” she’d said, but swayed by his enthusiasm, she had finished the box, lining the sides with flannel and goose down and a cover of blue-striped cotton.

“How’s my Sally been today?”

“Mardy. Nothing contents that bairn. She greets from dawn to dusk. Thank the Lord, she’s gone asleep now, give me a bit of peace.”

Lacey wanted to snap at the woman, but he didn’t dare antagonize her. She was a dour and sour-faced Scotswoman, but she was the only person he could find at such short notice who was willing to come up to their cottage in the

afternoons to “help out,” as he had euphemistically called it. What this meant, in fact, was to make sure the child was looked after. Twice in the past week, he’d come home to find Jessica gone, God knows where, and Sally alone. Once she was asleep, but the other time she wasn’t, just sitting in her crib bawling her eyes out. When he’d confronted Jess, she’d been remorseful but said she’d just gone out for a walk while Sally was asleep and hadn’t noticed the time.

He bent down and kissed his daughter lightly on her forehead. Asleep she looked angelic, but since the incident she had become fretful, prone to night terrors, wetting her bed every night. She screamed when he had to leave her and clung to him with the tenacity of a savage animal when he returned.

Mrs. McIsaac hadn’t yet made a move to make the tea, so Walter stood up and went to fetch the teapot from the cupboard. She watched him.

“Tea for you, ma’am?”

“No, I’ve got to get goin’. I have things to tend to.”

Her tone was aggrieved, as if he was imposing on her, even though he paid her as much as he could afford. “Mr. Lacey, I dinna think I can come much longer. I am a charitable person and will do an honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay, but I see no real need to be here. Your wife is quite capable of looking after her own bairn and her own husband.”

Walter busied himself with making the tea. “She caught a chill, and it makes her tired a lot. I’d prefer to take some responsibility off her shoulders until she’s quite better. She’s delicate, Jess is. And she’s still keening over the baby.”

The woman sucked on her lip as if she’d tasted something rather good. “That’s as may be, but there’s not a woman born who hasn’t experienced some sorrow. Most of us just carry on with our duties.”

“Jess has done that, Mrs. McIsaac. But it was a sad loss to both of us.”

"There's no denying that and it a boy, but it's going on four months now. She should be better than this. I myself have known sorrow, as I've told you."

"Many a time," Lacey couldn't resist interrupting, but Mrs. McIsaac was oblivious.

"A husband struck down in the prime of his life, and me with nine children to raise. I buried five, Mr. Lacey, five little ones. So I know what it is to keen. But your wife is a young lass. She'll have lots more bairns, I'm sure."

She glanced over at him rather lasciviously, and he thought for a moment she was going to ask him if he was fulfilling his manly duty.

He went over to the table and sat down. Mrs. McIsaac pursed her lips. "What I don't understand is why she's had such a setback. I thought she was getting over things. She must have had some kind of shock. Did a gypsy come by? Or a beggar?"

Lacey gulped down some of the tea. "Not that I know of." He ran his fingers through his hair, making tufts stand up about his ears. "I'm sorry, Mrs. McIsaac. I know it's hard on you, too. Sally can be difficult. I'll try to give you a bit extra at the end of the week."

"Where are you going to get extra? I know what wages you're making. You havna got no extra."

"Then I'll make it up other ways. I'll bring you over some more firewood. I'll chop some first thing tomorrow."

"That'll be a help, no denying, but I'm no telling you these things so you'll do more for me. I'm telling you because you should know. She looks like she could go into a decline, and then there's no saying what would happen."

"It's on account of this weather. Jess never did like days like this. She used to say the grey got right under her skin and made her mind the same colour."

"Mebbe. You must be firm with her. If you're too soft, she'll just stay like this."

Lacey shook his head. "She'll come around, I tell you. She was smiling like her old self just a couple of days ago."

Mrs. McIsaac stood up. "Have it your way, but dinna say I didna warn you." She went over to the door. "I've got to be off fore it gets dark. I've put on some potatoes ready to boil, and there's the pork you can fry up when you're ready."

"Thank you, ma'am. And Mrs. McIsaac, I do truly appreciate how much you're helping me out, but if you can be back by six I'd be much obliged. I've been late getting to work. Newcombe is being kind seeing the circumstances, but I can't afford to lose my job."

Mrs. McIsaac shrugged. "I'll do my best, but I have my own family to take care of."

She pulled her shawl tight around her head and stepped out into the chill air. Lacey watched as she trudged down the path and disappeared among the trees. Then he went back to the table and sat down, his head in his hands.

Sour old tart she is, making him sweat for every inch she gives .

Sally whimpered and he held his breath, listening. But she didn't wake up, and he relaxed again. Jess had been glad when she found there was a second child on the way. She was softer, allowing him closer than before. He had even painted the name SYLVANUS on the side of the cradle. Jess had laughed. "It's too old-fashioned a name, and besides, how do you know it's going to be a boy?"

"I was told it means 'dweller in the woods,' which is where we live now. And besides, I know I've given you a son."

She'd waved her hand at him dismissively, but he could see that secretly she was pleased. The infant was, in fact, a boy, but he was born three months too soon and he had died moments after he had entered the world.

Walter stood up, took another mug from the cupboard, and poured some hot tea. There was a bottle of brandy on the shelf, and he added a splash.

“Try to get her to take a tot as often as you can,” Mrs. McIsaac had said, “do her good.” But for the past few days, Jess had had no appetite.

He put the mug on a tray and added a dish of arrowroot pudding that Maria Newcombe had sent down. He was always trying to tempt Jess with dainties.

Nothing had been right since the miscarriage. Jessica took it as a punishment from God. She would not allow herself to weep or show her sorrow. The hurt was pushed deep inside where it festered, the way a sliver of wood that is buried in the skin is no longer visible but infects the entire body. On the surface their life proceeded more or less as it ever had. She tended to the cottage, prepared his meals, even allowed him connection with her, but he knew she had gone away from him. It was only with Sally that she showed any true emotion, grasping the child tightly to her breast several times a day until the poor mite would beg for release.

There were times when the unfairness of her behaviour filled him with rage. He shouted at her over trivialities; then overwhelmed by shame, he would leave the cottage and walk for hours down through the ravines as far as the harbour itself, until he could bear to face her again. But he thought he preferred even that half-life to the one they had been living recently. Jess had stopped even the most rudimentary care of the cottage; and even with her daughter, she was negligent.

He climbed the flight of stairs to the tiny loft where he'd made them a bedroom. The air in the room was stale. Jess hadn't been taking care of her own person either. At the moment she seemed to be sleeping.

He placed the tray on the dresser beside the bed.

“Jess? Jess, I've brought you some tea. Just the way you like it.”

He turned up the wick on the lamp. She was lying on her side facing the wall. “Are you awake, my chuck?”

She murmured something but didn't greet him or open her eyes. He touched his finger gently to her cheek. She had lost weight and the bones seemed sharp, and the lines from nose to mouth were those of an old woman.

"I've brought you some of Maria's best pudding, the kind you like."

She opened her eyes and gazed at him. "Please, Walter, I'm tired. I'll come down shortly."

He knelt down, took her inert hand in his, and held it to his lips. "Jess, you are my love, Jess. You must not leave me; I will not be able to bear it."

She didn't answer but shut her eyes again, pulled her hand away, and rolled over to face the wall.

Walter rocked back on his heels wondering whether or not he should rouse her out of her lethargy even if it meant a quarrel. Not that a barney would deter him if it brought her to life. Anger was preferable to this deadly indifference.

He stood up. Better leave it for now.

Lacey had lied to Mrs. McIsaac. He did, in fact, know all too well what had caused this relapse.

Chapter Eight

THE SERVICE OF THE MASS was so familiar that Murdoch had stopped listening. The Latin words slipped through his mind in a meaningless flow. He had been directed to the small chapel, where there were three other communicants, all women, all with black shawls covering their heads, almost indistinguishable from the nuns themselves. On the other side of the altar, out of sight, were the sisters. Susanna's coffin was on that side. He had not been allowed to see her body, and he'd had to say his final good-bye through the grille.

HOC EST ENIM CORPUS MEUM .

The priest genuflected then stood and elevated the host. At this point in the Mass, the faithful were expected to say, "My Lord and my God," but Murdoch was silent. He was close enough to the altar that the priest probably noticed, but Murdoch didn't care. The priest, Fr. Proulx, had spoken to him directly after Susanna died, but he didn't have much English and they were awkward with each other.

It was left to Sister Agnes to instruct Murdoch on the procedure of the funeral. A High Mass was to be held at seven o'clock. Susanna's body would be buried in the little cemetery behind the convent, but this, too, was enclosed, and he would not be allowed to visit the grave. "Monsieur Lavalle will take you to the station. Our Reverend Mother wishes me to extend to you her sincerest condolences. She also would like to inform you that Sister Philomena died shriven."

Murdoch bit back a retort. He wouldn't have expected anything else given she was a professed nun. God had

called her and now had claimed her. He felt a momentary pinch of fear at his own thoughts, which were approaching the blasphemous.

Sometime in the early hours of the morning, the extern had ushered him into a tiny room adjoining the parlour where there was a couch. He hadn't expected to sleep, but fatigue won out and he had actually fallen into a restless sleep, disturbed by dreams of pursuit and a monster that changed its shape every time he thought he had escaped. At six-thirty the convent bells began to peal. Sister Agnes returned, bringing him a slice of bread and a cup of strong, bitter coffee. She made no attempt at conversation, but her expression was kind. Shyly she indicated that there was a commode behind a screen in the corner of the room. On the washstand was a jug of tepid water and a razor and soap. When she left him alone, he felt an intense and childish pang of loneliness.

The priest had uncovered the chalice and was consecrating the wine now.

HIC EST ENIM CALIX SANGUINIS MEI NOVI ET AETERNI TESTAMENT ...

Again Murdoch's thoughts drifted away. The chapel was austere enough, but the chalice was of an ornate gold and there was a life-sized crucifix hung above the altar. He wondered what Mrs. Enid Jones would think about such adornments. As far as he knew the Baptist Church wouldn't even allow a wooden cross in the church, and the ministers wore black suits. He sighed. It was at times like this that he had to face how far apart they were in their respective faiths. Suddenly, he heard his sister's name, her religious name that is. Fr. Proulx was reciting a prayer for the dead.

Memento etiam, Domine, famulorum tuarum. SOEUR PHILOMENA , qui nos praecesserunt cum signo fidei, et dormiunt ni somno paces . He looked in his missal, although he knew what the words meant. In spite of his anger, they gave him comfort.

Remember also, Lord, your handmaiden, who has gone before us with the sign of faith and rests in the sleep of peace .

In a brief conversation with Sister Agnes, Murdoch realised that they believed him to be the sole remaining member of the family. In fact, he hadn't heard anything of his father for many years, but he assumed he was still alive. He didn't know if Susanna had deliberately chosen not to tell the nuns or if it was a misunderstanding. Neither he nor his sister had seen their father since Bertie's death. A few days after he'd gone, Murdoch and Susanna, afraid of what could happen between him and his father, had fled. He was just thirteen; she was nine. They had made their way to their only aunt, their mother's older sister, who lived forty miles away up the coast of Nova Scotia. Aunt Weldon was a spinster, a teacher who took them in because she had to – because our Lord commands us to have charity or we are as nothing. She had repeated this many times.

The priest was breaking the Host over the chalice, and the flat piece of unleavened bread made a snapping sound. Fr. Proulx was grey haired, well past middle age, and stooped. He had to peer shortsightedly at the book his server held in front of him.

The priest turned to face the communicants and held out the Host. One by one, the three women stood up and went to the communion rail. Murdoch followed them and they knelt together at the altar rail. He opened his mouth, and Fr. Proulx placed the bread on his tongue.

Corpus Domini nostri Jesus Christi custodiat animam tuam in vitam aeternam. Amen .

He then turned to the side of the altar to offer the Host to the nuns. They were all hidden from view, and Murdoch could see only the priest as he reached forward to the invisible woman at the prie-dieu.

Murdoch went back to the pew, trying to swallow the wafer of bread, which stuck to the roof of his mouth. The

nuns were singing a Miserere. He knelt down and tried to say the Paternoster.

He heard a sniffle beside him. One of the women was weeping. At what? She couldn't possibly have known Susanna. It was pure sentimental rubbish that she was crying like that. Murdoch's own eyes were dry. He was too angry to cry.

The singing ceased and the priest completed his rituals at the altar, wiping the chalice with the cloth and replacing it in the ciborium. He kissed the altar and turned to face the four of them.

Dominus vobiscum .

"And with thy spirit," replied the crying woman, her Latin somewhat indistinct.

Both priest and server made the sign of the cross, and Murdoch did the same. The mass was over. Fr. Proulx and the server disappeared into the sanctum, and the three women slipped away without any talking or acknowledgement of each other or him. He sat for a moment longer, the pungent odour of the incense tingling in his nostrils. The candles in the sconces flickered. It was daylight outside but another snow-filled grey morning, and the light in the chapel was dim.

Chapter Nine

PATRICK PUGH TILTED THE WASHSTAND MIRROR forward so he could see himself better. He separated out the front lock of his hair and daubed it with the bleach. His hair was naturally dark brown, thick, and wavy, but he'd been dyeing this one piece white for some time. He thought the flash gave a certain element of drama to his appearance, rather like a picture he'd seen of Mercury, the winged messenger. Besides, it was memorable. If anybody was talking about him, they inevitably referred to the man with the white streak in his hair. Then, if necessary, he could reverse that. Return to his normal appearance. "Have you seen a man, slim, about forty years of age, nobby dresser? He has a white lock of hair at the right temple?" "No, can't say I have." Pugh had found that, in some circumstances, it was better to be obvious than not. When you wanted to vanish, everybody was on the lookout for the flamboyant man in the tartan suit and red crusher, not the quiet, nondescript one in the plain grey overcoat and black fedora. He thought of it as a sort of magician's trick. "Look over here, at this scarf, not here where I am putting a card in my pocket." Pugh was fond of magic tricks and had learned several. On some of the lonely night watches, he practised legerdemain with a pack of cards. When he was tired of this work, he thought he would start a new career as a touring magician.

He whistled through his teeth, a jolly ballad he'd heard at the tavern. That was another thing he was good at, remembering tunes. He only needed to hear one once, and he could whistle the whole thing right through.

He scrutinised himself. That seemed good enough. He moved the mirror downward so he could get a glimpse of his naked loins. Yes, good. His stomach was as flat as a prizefighter's, and his thighs and calves firm and muscular. He could pass for a man at least ten years younger than he actually was. Finally, he stretched out his hands. Steady as rocks. The tip of his middle finger on the left hand was missing, and he never failed to experience a touch of chagrin at the sight. Even though he'd learned to take advantage of the defect, he was vain about his long, slender fingers. He'd suffered the loss when he was doing a stint as a mucker in a copper mine in Jerome, Arizona. Sheer carelessness on his part. But that was another tale to tell when he found time to recount his memoirs for posterity. Keeping his voice low, he started on the ballad.

*The wind sae could blew south and north,
And blew into the floor;
Quoth our goodman to our goodwife,
'Gae out and bar the door.'*

He went over to the bed where he'd laid out his clothes. First, the drawers and a fleece shirt, both a mixture of silk and wool because he had sensitive skin and pure wool was irritating. Over the shirt, he pulled on a flannel chest protector lined with soft chamois. The scarlet of the flannel clashed with the burgundy stripes of his shirt, but that couldn't be helped. It was unlikely anybody would be getting a gander at his underwear today. He had his eye on a plump little tart who sang at the Derby, but she would have to wait until his job was finished. Pugh believed in discipline. While he was on a job, he never consorted with women.

Next he reached for his long socks. They were getting worn and the heels needed darning, but he had no time to do it now. He fastened the leather straps tightly, then pulled on his tweed trousers, which he'd purchased from Mr.

Eaton's store only last month. Finally he put on his heavy wool jersey and checked the mirror again. Yes, he looked quite nobby. The brown sweater suited his dark complexion.

He picked up the imitation lamb cap, which was sitting on his dresser, and pulled it on. A snug fit. He had taken it from one of his former clients. He did not consider this stealing. The man had been less than generous with his fee, and Pugh had therefore supplemented it with the cap and a pair of decent raccoon gauntlets.

Pugh went to the wardrobe and took out the blue mackinaw. The jacket was waterproof, lined with tweed for warmth, and had a hood that gave him double protection from the weather and prying eyes. Pugh considered it was an ugly piece of apparel, but it served its purpose.

There was a silver flask in the inside pocket. He shook it. Good! Still some whiskey left. In the other pocket there was his deck of cards and his notebook and pencil. He hesitated for a moment then reached in the back of the wardrobe, pulled out a canvas bag, and undid the straps. Inside was his revolver. He took it out and stowed it in the mackinaw. He was ready. His cowhide boots were outside the door, cleaned and polished by the old man who also served as clerk to the hotel.

Pugh blew out his candle. He paid for each one he used, and he believed in being careful. He slipped out of his room and, carrying his boots, walked softly down the hall. There was only one light in the scone, the wick turned down so low it was almost useless. He went down the stairs, paused long enough at the door to put on his boots, and stepped out into the cold night.

*Then said the one unto the other,
'Here man, tak ye my knife;
Do ye tak off the auld man's beard,
And I'll kiss the goodwife.'*

Pugh fastened the flap on the hood so that the lower half of his face was covered. Perhaps today he would be lucky.

Chapter Ten

MRS. KITCHEN CAME OUT OF THE PARLOUR just as Murdoch was hanging up his coat and cap. She held out her hand to him. "Please accept my condolences, Mr. Murdoch."

"Thank you, Mrs. K. You got my telegram then?"

"Constable Crabtree brought it over this afternoon. And he also wanted me to convey his regrets. The inspector has given you a leave of absence until Friday."

Murdoch shrugged. A leave of absence meant no wages, and he would have been glad of the distraction of work. However, the inspector always insisted that any of the police officers who suffered bereavement take some time off. Murdoch had decided some time ago that this had nothing to do with genuine compassion and everything to do with saving money.

He unlaced his boots and, unbidden, Mrs. Kitchen took his slippers out of the brass slipper box by the coat stand and gave them to him.

"I have some supper waiting for you."

"Thank you indeed. I forgot to book a seat in the dining car, and the sittings were full. The last acquaintance my stomach has had with any food was about five o'clock this morning. One of the nuns brought me some vegetable soup."

"For your breakfast?"

"That's what they always eat apparently."

Beatrice allowed herself a mild tut-tut of disapproval. "I've braised you a pork chop."

He followed her into the kitchen.

"How is Arthur?"

"A little better today." She smiled. "He complains dreadfully about the cream and eggs, but I am certain they are helping him. He isn't as weak and is coughing less. Don't you think so, Mr. Murdoch?"

If he were honest, he would have to say he hadn't noticed much improvement. Arthur had some days that were not as bad as others, but the progression of the illness seemed relentless.

Murdoch made a noncommittal sort of grunt. He didn't want to be the one to dash her hopes either.

"He asked if you would care to join us after your supper."

"Thank you, I will."

He sat down at the pine table, and Mrs. Kitchen took his plate out of the warming oven.

"I'll let you have your meal in peace." "Please stay, Mrs. K. I would enjoy some company."

"I'd be happy to."

She perched herself in the chair opposite him. The pork chop was overcooked and dry and the potatoes lumpy, but he made enthusiastic sounds of appreciation for her sake. It didn't take long for him to consume everything. He sopped up the grease with a piece of bread.

"I was there at the end, but they wouldn't let me get close or touch her. I only saw her shadow through a grille. She is buried in the private cemetery of the convent, and I didn't see that either."

Mrs. Kitchen got up to remove his plate. She brought over a piece of apple tart and placed it in front of him. Murdoch rubbed at his eyes. He was overwhelmingly tired.

"If I may say so, Mr. Murdoch, the nuns were only doing what they ought to do. That is their vow. They call it 'enclosure,' I believe. Once in, the only people ever allowed to see them are a doctor or a priest. I know my cousin's daughter entered a cloistered order. She went down to America, but they never clapped eyes on her after she took her final vow."

“It’s unnatural.”

“I suppose you could say that, but it’s a sacrifice they and the family make for Our Lord’s sake.”

Murdoch knew it was useless to argue with Mrs. Kitchen on certain matters, especially if they pertained to the church. She was as good-hearted as a woman can be, but any questioning of their mutual faith made her uneasy. She was rigid and dogmatic to the point of superstition. Besides, it was too late and he was too tired to talk much. However, as she had done so often in the past, Mrs. Kitchen surprised him.

“Frankly, if it had been up to me, Mr. Murdoch, if I was the prioress, I would have broken the rules in those circumstances. What the harm is in a man saying a final farewell to his only sister, I don’t know.”

He smiled at her, his irritation gone. “Thank you, Mrs. K. I cannot say I detected any softening in the nuns. Not that I saw them either. Even the funeral was conducted with them on the other side of a wall. I could hear them chanting, but that was it.”

She spooned three generous spoonfuls of tea leaves into the teapot and added boiling water from the kettle.

“Let it steep for a minute. But before I forget, there’s a letter for you. The constable brought it over with the telegram. I’ll fetch it.”

She bustled off and he got up to pour his tea before it became strong enough to dissolve the enamel on his teeth. Mrs. Kitchen came back with a long envelope in her hand. There was a seal on the back with an official-looking stamp in it. Murdoch used his knife to slit open the flap.

The letterhead was that of James Massie, the warden of Don Jail.

Dear Mr. Murdoch. Will you be so good as to call at my office as soon as possible. One of our prisoners is anxious to have communication with you. A morning hour would be best at your earliest convenience.

Your servant, J. M. Massie, Warden

“Not bad news I hope,” said Mrs. Kitchen.

“No, probably good news. I believe I mentioned young Adam Blake to you a couple of months ago, the lad convicted of pickpocketing? I was the one nabbed him, and I thought he might be set straight with a good talking to. He wasn’t that receptive I have to admit, but I told him I’d come and visit when he saw the error of his ways. I assume a spell in jail has brought clarity to his mind.”

“So it should.” She reached in the pocket of her apron. “By the way, Mr. Murdoch, I took the liberty of cutting this for you.”

She took out a wide strip of black silk.

“Thank you, Mrs. K.”

He raised his arm and she fastened the band to his jacket sleeve where he would wear it for the next few months as a sign of mourning. He sighed. Poor little Cissie.

Chapter Eleven

CHARLES CRAIG OPENED HIS EYES and lay still for a moment, trying to determine what had awakened him. His wife, Margaret, was snoring softly beside him as she did when she had been forced to take laudanum for her pain. The room was hot and smelled of the ammonia liniment she applied nightly to her swollen joints. He listened but the only other sound was the scratch and rustle of the evergreens that grew beside the house. He slipped out of bed and, barefoot, padded over to the window. The blind was pulled down tight to the sill, and he lifted the side a crack so he could look out. Their bedchamber was at the rear of the house and below him was a large garden, smooth and white with the recent snow. Directly in front, the ground rose gently to a high fence, which demarcated the edge of their neighbour's property. Their house was hidden by a thick stand of evergreens that extended to the right and down to the road, offering perfect privacy. To the left was an open field. He thought he could detect a slight movement, a deeper shadow among the shadows of the evergreens in the upper corner, but he wasn't certain. The sky was overcast, and the moon was obscured.

He stayed motionless at the window for several minutes then, with a little groan, straightened up. Margaret muttered in her sleep, and he went back to the bed and pulled the quilt up around her shoulders. He waited a moment to make sure she had not awoken, then he went to the wardrobe and took out his trousers and a jacket. He favoured the newer style of nightwear, and he was wearing striped flannelette pyjamas. He pulled the trousers and coat on over these and

crept from the room. There were no candles lit on the landing or stairwell, but his eyes were accustomed to the darkness and he made his way downstairs to the study. There was a dull slit of light showing beneath the door. He knocked, one hard tap followed by two softer ones. In a moment his son opened the door. Craig had moved out of view a few paces down the hallway and, without pause, James joined him.

"Is he out there again?" he asked.

"I'm not completely certain. Did the dogs bark just now?"

"They did a little while ago." James looked discomfited. "It didn't seem too serious," he added. "I thought it must be a squirrel or a raccoon."

"There are occasions when you are worse than the most ignorant loafer," said Charles. He did not raise his voice or insert much inflection, but James flushed as if he had been roundly scolded.

"I'm sorry, Papa."

"Never mind." Charlie nodded in the direction of the study. "Are the curtains closed tight?"

"They are."

"Let's go in."

Craig led the way back into the room. James had been enjoying a pipe, and the air was thick and aromatic with the smoke. There was a glass of whiskey on the table beside his chair. His father walked straight over to the desk and rolled back the top.

The pug who had been keeping James company trotted over to him, waving her little curl of a tail. Craig gave her a cursory pat on the head.

"Is Tiny in the kennel?"

"Yes, of course."

Craig removed one of the inner desk drawers and reached his hand inside, turning the wooden screw that unlocked the secret compartment.

"Where is he?" asked James.

"Same place in the east upper corner." He took a small leather billy out of the hidden drawer.

"What do you want me to do?" asked James.

Craig pointed to the mantel clock, a showy walnut piece with much ormolu trim.

"Stay in here until that chimes the quarter. I'm going to come around through the copse. When it's time, open the curtains wide and stand in front of the window. Make a point of yawning and stretching. Then pick up Bess, get the lamp, and leave the room. Keep the lamp lit and go to the back door. Put on your boots and coat and step outside onto the patio a little ways. Make a show of getting Bess to relieve herself. Make a lot of noise about it. This is your chance to pretend you're Edmund Keane."

He put on his jacket and slipped the billy into his pocket.

"What if this fellow has a pistol?"

Craig shrugged. "You know what to do. Don't stand in the light; keep moving around. I should be close enough by then to stop him, but if I shout, get out of the way fast." Then, with a curt nod for his son, he left.

James sat down in the armchair and gulped back the rest of his whiskey. His pipe had gone out, but he didn't attempt to light it. Bess jumped up beside him, and he stroked her ears. Ten minutes dragged by, and the clock started to strike. He got up, went to the window, and flung open the curtains. He couldn't see anything outside, but knowing how visible he was made him uneasy. He did a quick yawn and stretch, snapped his fingers at Bess, and walked out of the room. At the back door he waited, listening, but everything was silent. It was almost one o'clock, and people were long in bed. He put on his overcoat and slipped into his boots, picked up the dog, and stepped out onto the patio. Hearing him, Tiny popped out of her kennel and barked. James moved into the shadows, put Bess on the ground, and called out clearly, "Hurry up, Bess, don't take all night." Then he

started to walk up and down, clapping his hands. Tiny continued to bark, and Bess joined in, spinning round him.

"That's enough, come on." He went over to the kennel, which was at the end of the patio, persuaded the pug to come over, and fastened her to a long leash. "Be good, you two." That done he returned to the back door, picked up his lantern, and went inside. He extinguished the light and waited in the hall. The dogs had quieted down and gone into their kennel, and it must have been only five minutes later when he heard the soft crunch of snow as somebody headed towards the door. His father entered.

"You didn't wait long out there, James."

"Sorry, Papa. Did you see him?"

"A glimpse. He was already moving away across Hernsworth's field. Either finished his job or knew we were on to him. He wasn't hurrying, so he probably swallowed your charade."

"What does he look like?"

"He's not too tall, shorter than you and me by a good foot, but he was wearing a mackintosh with the hood up, and I couldn't tell what size he was, broad or slim." Craig blew on his cold hands and began to take off his outdoor clothes. "I examined the ground where he'd been standing, but there was nothing to see: no tobacco juice, no cigar butts. However long he had been there, he was a patient man."

"What do you think we should do, Papa."

"For now, nothing." For the first time, Craig grinned. "It is possible that we are making a mountain out of a molehill. He could be out there for a dozen reasons. He might be a shy suitor trying to catch a glimpse of Adelia for one thing. Or he could be a dog snatcher, looking to carry off our pride and joy." He blew on his hands again. "Or he's nosing into our business."

They had been standing in the hall, speaking in low voices. Craig tapped his son lightly on the cheek. "By the

way, James, you are looking most fearful. I've told you many times, you must never show fear. Never."

"I'm sorry, I didn't realise." James summoned up his characteristic, sunny smile.

"That's better. You must take a lesson from what happened to that poor sod, Harry Murdoch. He was his own worst enemy."

"I didn't know you felt sorry for him, Papa."

Craig shrugged. "Of course I do. Not a lot but somewhat. Now off to bed with you. In the morning we'll go out and have another look around. He just may have left something behind, although I doubt it. This man is experienced."

James kissed him good night and left. Craig didn't move but stood and chafed his cold hands again. He knew he wouldn't sleep yet; his blood was still racing. He needed a bit of soothing, a release. He made his way up the rear stairs, past the second-floor landing to the third. There were two chambers up here. One was used as a storage room; the other was where his sister-in-law slept. He opened the door to this room and went inside. "Carmel," he whispered. "Carmel, wake up, dear, it's me."

Jessica didn't want to go back to bed just yet. Walter was not a heavy sleeper, and it seemed that the smallest movement on her part woke him. She'd half expected him to be waiting at the door. She knew it came from love, but his solicitude was oppressing her, ultimately futile. He could not help her, could not offer any relief from her torment.

She didn't risk raking the coals even though she was chilled to the bone. Her boots were worn thin at the soles, and her stockings were damp from the snow that had leaked through. In her crib, Sally turned and cried out, "Mama, Mama." Jessica went over to her, but she was fast asleep. She looked flushed, and in a rush of alarm Jessica touched her forehead. She was warm but not overly so, and Jessica

pulled back the coverlet to cool her. Then, wrapping her hands in the ends of her shawl, she began to pace around the room. A large Bible was on its special stand by the window and she halted in front of it, touching the soft leather cover as if it were a live creature. She opened it at the back page where her mother had written down the family tree as she remembered it.

Evangeline Plain had married Josiah Watkins. They had seven children of whom four had lived to adulthood, Phoebe, Thomas, David, and the youngest, Jessica.

She moved her finger along the careful handwriting. Jessica had married Walter Lacey. Her mother had given her the Bible as a wedding present, and Jessica remembered how proudly and carefully she had entered the name of her firstborn, Sarah, called Sally, born October 30, 1891. There was another line underneath ready for the next entry, and Walter had written Sylvanus. The foetus had not been viable, but according to the church he had lived long enough inside her to have a soul and his christening and burial had been simultaneous. Jessica pressed her own breasts. If the infant had gone full term, he would have been suckling now.

She stood for a moment and touched the Bible reverentially. She had witnessed her mother many times gain solace from what she insisted was the word of God made manifest, and Jessica desperately needed guidance. She opened the book at Proverbs and without looking ran her finger down the page, continuing as prayerfully as she could until she felt the impulse to stop. She looked down. She had halted at chapter 30, verses 15-16.

The horseleach hath two daughters, crying Give, give. There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, four things say, It is not enough:

The grave; and the barren womb; the earth that is not filled with water; and the fire that saith not, It is enough.

The words became shards of glass in her throat.

Chapter Twelve

THE DON JAIL , an imposing grey stone building, was set back from the street on a slight rise so that it was visible to the neighbourhood. A broad gravel driveway, always neatly raked, swept up to the arched entrance as if to a manor house, although there any similarities ended. Murdoch had been here on numerous previous occasions, but he had been in through the front entrance only once before when he was in the role of a visitor. This was when he'd gone to talk to Adam Blake, the boy he'd caught pickpocketing. Normally, the boy would have been sent off to The Boy's Industrial school. However, the police magistrate, Denison, who tried the case, was notoriously unpredictable. Expressing great sympathy for the woman, he'd sentenced young Blake to sixty days in Don Jail. Murdoch thought there was intelligence in the boy and hoped that by showing some interest in him, he could help him find a better path. However, he might as well have saved his breath. Blake was sullen and uncommunicative and not at all interested in changing his ways.

Murdoch walked up the curving stone steps to the big double doors. There was a carved stone column on either side and over the lintel was a large carving of a man's head, also fashioned out of grey stone. The hair and beard curled out like snakes, and the eyes were prominent and doleful. Murdoch thought it looked like a decapitated criminal, but he'd been told it represented Father Time, a caution to those who were foolishly wasting theirs.

He tugged on the bellpull. There was a small barred and shuttered window in the door to the right, and almost

immediately, the wooden panel slid open. A man, who could have been at the mouth of Hades to judge from his forbidding expression, thrust his face into the opening. He viewed Murdoch with immediate suspicion. "What's your business? Visiting on Sunday only."

"Warden Massie sent for me. I'm Acting Detective Murdoch, Number Four Station."

The guard glanced down at something, presumably a list of some kind, and his expression changed. "You can come in." He was ushered into a tiny foyer.

"Sorry if I didn't offer you the best greeting just now, Mr. Murdoch, but we get all kinds of sob stories to get us to break the rules. Most of them a pile of horse plop." He offered Murdoch his hand. "Clarence Howe, at your service."

Murdoch shook hands.

"Sorry for your loss," said Howe, indicating Murdoch's badge of mourning. He nodded an acknowledgment but didn't feel like offering any further information.

"How is young Blake doing? Has a few weeks in the brig brought him to his senses finally?"

"Blake? You're talking about Adam Blake? Tow-headed little filch?"

"That's the one."

"Come to his senses? Not him. He's heading straight for a rope necklace, if you ask me."

Puzzled, Murdoch was about to ask if Howe knew the reason for his summons, but a door behind them opened and another guard emerged. He, too, had a military bearing with short, cropped hair and a long, waxed moustache.

"The warden says he's ready to see you, Detective. Come this way."

Mr. Massie's office was on the second floor at the rear of the building, facing the prisoners' exercise court. The new guard didn't speak as he led the way, and they marched down a dimly lit corridor, their footsteps echoing on the stone floor, the guard's keys clinking at his waist. A narrow

flight of stairs led to another locked door. This opened into a short corridor, plainly decorated with rush carpeting and unadorned dark brown walls. The warden's door was at the end of the hall, and Murdoch felt as if he should have snapped to attention when they halted. The guard tapped on the warden's door.

"Come."

James Massie had been standing by the window behind his desk, but he immediately came over to greet Murdoch, offering his hand. He was a short man, of middle age with a smooth, bald pate that he balanced with a trim moustache and beard. He wore gold pincenez, which accentuated his rather scholarly look.

"Detective Murdoch, please have a seat." He waved in the direction of the leather padded chair that was in front of his desk. Murdoch sat down, removing his hat and placing it on the floor beside him.

The guard turned on his heels smartly and left the room. The warden took the chair on the other side of the wide desk. The surface was bare except for an inkwell and pen tray and a large ledger. Massie moved the ledger to one side, lining it up neatly with the edge of the desk. Murdoch wondered if he was always this uncomfortable.

"Thank you for coming so promptly, Mr. Murdoch. I, er, didn't feel I should impart my news in a letter, so I assume you do not know the reason for my sending for you?"

"I thought it might be young Blake, but I gather that is not the case."

"Ah yes, Blake. No, no, that is correct. It is not concerning him."

Massie opened the drawer on his right and took out a buff folder that was stuffed with sheets of paper. He pushed the pince-nez up his nose. The lens magnified his brown eyes.

"Well, I won't beat around the bush any longer. We have a prisoner here. His name is Henry Murdoch, known as Harry Murdoch. He claims he is your father."

Murdoch stared at him. "My father? How could he be my father?"

Massie riffled through the papers and took out one of the sheets.

"Henry Francis Murdoch, born in the city of Halifax, Nova Scotia, in the year of Our Lord, eighteen hundred and thirty-nine. He was married to Miss Mary Weldon, also of the city of Halifax, now deceased. There were three issue: a son, William, born in sixty-one; a daughter, Susanna, born in sixty-four; and a second son, Albert, also deceased." His tone was conciliatory. "I realise this must be a shock to you, sir, but we are correct, are we not? Henry Murdoch *is* your father?"

For a moment Murdoch felt as if he were gaping like a fool at the man in front of him. It had been such a long time since he had had anything to do with Harry. When he spoke, he could hear how cold his voice sounded. "It must be correct. Those are certainly the pertinent details of my father's life. What has he done this time?"

Massie pursed his lips, hesitating. "He has been convicted of murder."

He waited to see if there was any reaction, but Murdoch had retreated into the wooden mode of expression that gripped him in moments of great stress.

The warden looked down at his sheet of paper and read as if it were important he not include a single word not officially recorded: "On August the fourth, last, he was charged with the willful murder of one John Delaney of the county of York. He was tried before a jury of his peers and convicted on December sixth. He was sentenced to be hung, the sentence to be carried out on Monday, December sixteenth."

"What were the circumstances of the murder?" Murdoch asked, although he thought he could guess. A drunken brawl, one blow too hard. Massie turned back and indicated a large sheaf of papers that were tacked together.

“This is a copy of the complete court records, but I can summarize the case if you wish.”

“If you please.”

“The crime occurred on August fourth in the ravine area to the east of Yonge Street where Summerhill ends. There is a tavern at the end of the street named the Manchester ...”

He glanced at Murdoch, who shrugged. He hadn't heard of it. “Apparently, the proprietor, Vincent Newcombe, organises terrier matches, the object being to see which dog can kill the most rats in a given length of time. Mr. Murdoch was a participant in such a match. According to the witnesses, he lost heavily and became enraged, accusing almost everybody of cheating him. The man who emerged a winner was the man who was found murdered, John Delaney. Again, all witnesses agreed that Harry left the premises first. Two hours or so later, Delaney's wife became concerned when her husband had not returned home and sent her son to the tavern to enquire after him. He had apparently left not too long after Harry. One of the witnesses, a Mr. Pugh, offered to return with Delaney's son, and he discovered the body lying in the creek. He had not drowned but had suffered severe blows to the back of the head. Harry Murdoch was found lying in the grass only a few feet away. When roused and told of Mr. Delaney's death, he replied, ‘He got what he deserved.’ Mr. Pugh, on suspicion of culpability, bound Murdoch's hands, and when the constable arrived, Murdoch was arrested.”

“Is that the sum of the evidence against him?”

“By no means. Mr. Delaney was left handed, and your father had a bruise on his right cheek, which corresponded to abrasions found on the dead man's left knuckles. There was blood on Murdoch's right sleeve and on the front of his shirt. He had no good reason to be where he was in the ravine. His boardinghouse was located at the far end of Shaftesbury Avenue in the opposite direction. Finally, there was money missing from Mr. Delaney's pouch. Of course, his

remark concerning the poor man's death was most damning, Mr. Delaney was held in high respect by his church and community."

"In spite of his predilection for gambling?"

"Apparently a forgivable sin."

"And Harry Murdoch had been drinking, I suppose?"

"According to the witnesses, he was quite full."

Murdoch felt a rush of bile into his mouth. The years hadn't changed his father. Massie averted his eyes, tactfully.

"I must say that since he has been here he is quite redeemed. He is learning how to read a little and has shown quite an aptitude for sketching. He cannot, of course, drink to excess even if he wished to, but he has taken the Pledge and every week he receives communion. He has returned to his faith. Roman Catholic, I believe?"

Murdoch nodded.

"The coroner's jury concluded he had lain in wait for his enemy just below the bridge. They quarrelled. Murdoch struck Delaney, probably with a piece of wood, and toppled him into the creek. Then, overcome by the exertion and still under the influence of the liquor, he lost consciousness and did not awake until he was discovered later by Mr. Pugh. Those are the bare bones of the case. You can certainly look at this report at your leisure if you wish."

"Is there any point, Warden?"

Massie realigned the ledger again. "That is entirely up to you."

"Did he plead guilty?"

"No, he did not. He swears he is innocent." Massie coughed politely. "But then that is quite common, isn't it?"

"Why has he asked to see me?"

"I am aware that you have not seen each other for some time. He told me himself that you had a falling out when you were a young man."

"You might call it that."

Murdoch knew his voice was bitter, but he couldn't help it. The so-called falling out was a violent quarrel that would have ended in bloodshed except that Harry was too drunk to remain upright. Murdoch, who was just thirteen years old but already growing tall, had accepted the blows his father was raining on his head and shoulders, too proud to do anything other than defend himself. When Harry had staggered and fallen to the ground, Murdoch had walked away, vowing he would never again allow his father to beat him. The last sight he'd had of his father was the man lying on his back in the middle of the living room, snoring, dribbling, and stinking.

"It's been a long time," he said out loud.

The warden rocked back in his chair. "Your father intends to ask you to prove his innocence."

Murdoch grimaced. "Does he indeed? That's why he has tracked me down then?"

"He was not aware until yesterday that you were with the police force. I believe he was more of the mind to see you one more time."

"A reconciliation, you mean?"

"Just so. The shadow of the gallows is a long one, Mr. Murdoch, and dark. I have seen many men repent of their sins when they are about to face that last journey." He stood up. "We have a room for visitors. The guard will take you there, and I will have Mr. Murdoch brought down. We cannot, of course, offer you complete privacy, but I will instruct the guard to leave you alone. And by the way, I have given permission for the prisoner to smoke. Under normal circumstances I do not allow any tobacco or pipes, but in this case, he may have one if he wants."

Murdoch also stood up. He could feel his heart beating faster, and his mouth felt dry. It was a long time since he and Harry had stood face to face.

Chapter Thirteen

THE GUARD , TYLER, SHOWED MURDOCH into the visitor's room. "Take any seat you like."

The room was plain, with a plank floor and one long table running down the centre. About a dozen chairs were crammed along each side, but the table was demarcated with strips of wood to indicate each place. The prisoners had to keep their hands visible within these barriers. The air was close, permanently saturated with the smell of fear and anger. Murdoch chose a chair at the end of the table and sat down. Two doors with narrow, barred windows faced each other across the room. The prisoner came in from one side and the visitor from the other. The guard walked over to the opposite door and pushed an electric button, which presumably gave a signal to the cells.

"They'll be here in a minute," he said. He eyed Murdoch curiously. "One of your nabs, is he?"

"No," said Murdoch and he deliberately began to look around the room. A row of high windows to his right let in natural light but they were too high up to give a view of the outside. It was a dull, grey morning and the wall sconces had been lit. To one side of the door facing him was a portrait of her Majesty. The Queen was depicted in her robes of state and the scarlet, ermine-trimmed train and crimson drapery behind her glowed vividly. Murdoch thought the portrait was a fine copy, better than the one that was in his cubicle at the police station. Directly behind him was a large oil painting of the chief constable, Lieutenant-Colonel Grasett. This one was in the prisoner's line of vision.

"I'll be outside the door. Holler if you need me," said the guard and left.

Murdoch took the opportunity to remove the black band from his sleeve. He wasn't ready to share the news of Susanna's death with his father. He sat back, undid his coat, and took out his watch. It was two minutes past the half hour. He knew he was trying to look at ease. It was far from the way he felt, but he'd be damned if he'd give Harry the satisfaction of knowing he was nervous.

He heard the sound of footsteps shuffling. Hurriedly he went back to the table and sat down. The door opened and in came another guard. He stood back to usher in his prisoner. This man, in grey prison uniform, was heavysset, with a pale, clean-shaven face. He was balding and what hair remained was grizzled. Relief rushed through Murdoch. There was a mistake; this was not his father. He was too old, too heavy.

The prisoner moved awkwardly to the table, and suddenly he smiled.

"Hello, Willie. It's been a long time."

It was only then, in the voice, that Murdoch knew it was his father. He stood up so abruptly that the chair tilted backwards and tipped over to the ground with a crash. He flushed with embarrassment, feeling clumsy and foolish, the way he always had in his father's presence.

"Still got two left feet, I see," said Harry.

Murdoch straightened the chair and sat down, while his father eased himself into the opposite seat. He held out his hand. "Come on, son. There's been a lot of water under the bridge, but we're still the same flesh and blood. Won't you at least shake your own father's hand?"

His father's grip was firm, the palm hard and calloused the way he remembered. Harry had taken pride in that. His blows had been as damaging as a piece of wood.

The guard stepped back. "My name's Barker. I'll let you both alone, but I'll be watching through the window.

Murdoch, put both your hands on the table and leave them there."

It was strange hearing somebody else referred to by his name. His father was scrutinising him, and he forced himself to meet his gaze.

"You've changed, Will, but I suppose that is to be expected. You were a lad when I saw you last. Now it's like staring into a mirror." He ran his hand across his cropped hair. "Rather, say, a reflection of the way I used to be. How old are you now? Thirty-five?"

"Thirty-four."

Murdoch was curt. He had never thought of himself as resembling his father, and it didn't sit well with him. "Warden Massie says you've been convicted of murder."

Now it was Harry who flushed. "Forget the niceties, eh, Will? Yes, that's the fact of it." He grinned again but it was like watching a dog snarl. "Unless there's a miracle, I won't be bringing in the new year." He made a grotesque gesture to indicate the hanging.

"The warden said you beat a man to death because you lost money at a betting match."

There was a sudden glint of anger in Harry's eyes, and his lips tightened. Even now, after all these years, that look sent a stab of fear through Murdoch's body. He leaned back in his chair.

"Why did you want to see me?"

Harry managed to drag up some kind of smile. "I know we didn't part on good terms, Will, and I'm sorry for that. But as you can see, I'm in desperate straits. I was hoping you might help me."

"How?"

Harry rubbed at his scalp again. "I never could talk to a man who looked as if he was about to haul off and wallop me one. Makes me nervous."

"Does it, Harry? Nothing I can do about that."

He had used his father's Christian name deliberately and provocatively, but Harry didn't take him up on it.

"Barker told me I can have a pipe. You wouldn't happen to have 'baccy on you, would you?"

Murdoch debated for a brief moment whether or not to deny him, but that felt too childish so he fished in his inside pocket and took out his tobacco pouch and matches, pushing them across the table towards his father. He waited while Harry opened the pouch and sniffed at the tobacco hungrily.

"Good stuff, Will."

Murdoch waited until Harry had filled the pipe, lit up, and drawn in the smoke. The motions were so familiar to him. He'd seen his father do that hundreds of times – and with the same grin of satisfaction across his face. He'd bought him a pipe once as a Christmas present. He'd had to work scrubbing the decks of the trawling fleet until he'd saved up enough money. Forty cents was a month's worth of work. Fishermen weren't able to be generous. Uncannily, Harry seemed to pick up on his thoughts.

"Remember that sweet little briar you gave me, Will? The bowl was all carved. Silver tip, too. Very swell piece."

Murdoch nodded. "You broke it a few weeks later."

Harry's face was momentarily lost in a swirl of fragrant smoke. "Did I just? Well, I'm sorry for it. It was a splendid gift." He glanced in Murdoch's direction. "I must say, you've grown to a fine man. Have you married?"

"No."

Harry sighed. "After twenty-two years, we have a lot to catch up with, but right now I'm like a dog watching its dinner. There's not much else I can focus on."

"You said you wanted me to help you? In what way?"

Harry lowered his pipe. "I'm innocent, Will. I didn't kill that man. There wasn't any solid evidence, but the jury didn't care. Our Bertie had more brains than all of them put together. I didn't stand a chance."

It was the reference to his brother that infuriated Murdoch. Harry seemed to have entirely forgotten how he had made the boy's life a misery because he was slow.

"I understand you quarrelled with the man shortly before he was killed."

Harry sneered and, for a moment, the thin patina of benevolence slipped. "You understand, do you? How clever of you."

Murdoch's jaw felt tight and stiff as if he wouldn't be able to talk properly. Time vanished, and they were once again staring at each other across the kitchen table. Involuntarily, he steeled himself for the next move: Harry grabbing him by the front of his shirt and lifting him out of his seat. Unexpectedly, however, his father's expression softened, and his body slumped down in the chair.

"I'm sorry, Will. We're not getting off on the right foot. I want you to know I'm not the same fellow I used to be. I haven't had a drop to drink since August. The world looks different when you're sober. If I could live my life all over again, believe me I would and liquor would have no part in it."

Murdoch stared back at him. It was still a stranger's face, puffy, unhealthy-looking skin. Only the brown eyes, which he had inherited, seemed the same.

"You haven't yet said how I can help you."

Harry turned to studying the bowl of the little pipe, and he tamped down the tobacco with the end of the match. "I must admit I didn't know till now that you were a police officer. I thought you were a lumberjack. I sent off a letter. Thought maybe you could hire somebody to investigate for me, but this is even better."

"Need I point out that as far as the law is concerned, the case is closed. Shut. You've been convicted."

"I didn't do it. I swear."

"It's quite possible you just don't remember. You hit him in a drunken rage, and now you've forgotten. That's happened

before.”

Harry flinched as if he had been struck. “I know, Will. I know that it did, and I’d give my right arm if I could undo it but I can’t. But I don’t want to hang for a crime I didn’t commit.”

Murdoch shrugged. “There isn’t anything I can do.”

“Yes, there is. You’re a detective. Talk to people again. The police had their minds made up I was guilty, and they didn’t do much investigating. Somebody killed the man, but it wasn’t me, I swear.” Harry met his eyes. “You’re the only hope I’ve got. No matter what’s gone down between us, you are my flesh and blood. You can’t deny me that.” He moved his hand as if he would touch Murdoch’s but stopped. “You know I’m a man don’t beg easily, Will, and I’m begging you. Don’t turn your back on me out of spite.”

The door opened and Barker came in. “It’s time for the exercise yard.”

“Can’t I go later?”

“You know you can’t.”

“I’ll skip it then.”

“No, you can’t do that either.”

“I’ll come back later,” said Murdoch.

Harry nodded. “Not too much later. I’ve learned the clocks run differently when you’re in jail. An hour can seem like a week.” He held up the pouch. “Can I hold on to this?”

Murdoch shrugged. “If you want to.”

“Let’s get a move on,” said Barker, and he ushered Harry out. Agitated, Murdoch pushed back his chair, drumming his fingers on the scarred table. This was not what he had expected. He had imagined an encounter with his father many times, but not like this. Not with this soft-voiced, defeated man. A man who seemed sincere. A reformed man. Murdoch put his head in his hands. Somewhere at the back of his mind, he was disappointed. He wanted to go on hating him.

Chapter Fourteen

TYLER MUST HAVE BEEN WATCHING through the other window because he came into the room immediately. "Visit go all right then?"

Murdoch looked up at him, willing himself not to take out his anger on the man.

"It depends on what you mean by all right. I didn't hit him, or he me. I suppose that means it was all right."

The guard whistled through his teeth. "Like that, is it?"

Murdoch got to his feet. "Do you think I could talk to the warden?"

"He wants to. Told me so personally. He's put off his inspection of the cells on your account."

His tone was enigmatic, and Murdoch couldn't tell if Tyler thought this was a reason for respect or resentment. He decided that in the guard's eyes, this deviation from Warden Massie's usual routine had elevated Murdoch's status. He followed him back down the corridor.

"I must say that the prisoner is no trouble. I wish they were all like that."

Murdoch made no comment.

They were outside the warden's office. Tyler tapped and at the "Come," they both went in.

Warden Massie was behind his desk, reading from a sheaf of papers.

"Ha, good. I wonder if you would join me in some morning tea, Mr. Murdoch. Or would you prefer coffee? We have that."

"Tea if you please."

Tyler left.

“Good choice if I may say so. Our coffee here resembles weak mud. At least I imagine that is what mud would taste like.” Massie glanced over the top of his pince-nez. “How was your meeting? You haven’t seen each other for, what? Twenty-two years you said?”

“Yes. No contact at all. I was not sure my f–” Murdoch still couldn’t get his tongue around the word “father.” He continued. “I wasn’t sure if he was even still alive.”

“Ah, quite so.”

“He’s asking me to do some investigating of the case.”

“I expected he would.”

“What is your opinion, Warden? You followed the trial no doubt. Do you consider him guilty?”

Massie hesitated. “In cases of serious crime I attempt to be knowledgeable about the circumstances. The prisoners, naturally enough, will present their own side. I have had to write to the convicting magistrate more than once to find out the truth.” He sighed. “I regret to say, Mr. Murdoch, that the longer I am in this position, exposed to such elements of society, the more hardened I become. I have almost lost my faith in the capacity of men, any men, to tell the truth. In this case I will tell you frankly, I am not certain. Since he has been here, Harry Murdoch has been sober, quiet, and industrious. He has returned to his own faith.”

“That could be seen as hedging your bets, couldn’t it? He *is* facing death, after all.”

Murdoch realised how callous his words sounded by the puzzled expression of Massie’s face. But the warden’s voice was kind.

“Quite so. Unless there is a significant intervention. I have here a copy of the court records. I thought you might be interested to read it.”

He pushed the papers toward Murdoch, who did not touch them.

“Mr. Massie, you have avoided answering my question. You said that the prisoner is being docile and pious, but you

have not offered your opinion as to whether he is guilty as charged.”

The warden removed the pince-nez and rubbed at the red spot on the bridge of his nose where they had marked him.

“I have twice gone through these papers. The evidence seems irrefutable. In my opinion, your father is the one who murdered John Delaney. I’m sorry. I wish I could say otherwise.” He tapped the papers in front of him. “I thought perhaps it might set your mind at rest, given the circumstances.”

“Those being that Harry Murdoch and I are related by blood, and that if there was an outside chance he was innocent, I would therefore seize any opportunity to prove that?”

“Quite so, but I see ...”

Massie was saved from continuing by the return of Tyler with the tea tray.

The warden, in Murdoch’s opinion, was wasted in the prison system. He should have been in the ministry. He was the most sympathetic and tactful of men. He directed the conversation to general matters about the conditions in the city. He was all for allowing the streetcars to run on Sunday, as he thought it would benefit the poorer classes. It was difficult for some families to visit the prison when they lived a distance away. And he was adamant that his charges benefited from contact with those who might arouse their more tender feelings. By the time they had finished their cups of tea, Murdoch had calmed down sufficiently to want to look at the trial records. Massie set him up in a tiny adjoining room while he went to do his daily tour of inspection. Tyler replenished the teapot, brought him some notepaper and pen and ink, and left him to it. Murdoch picked up the bound documents. They were typewritten duplicates, and for a moment they made him think of Enid,

whose work often consisted of making copies of legal documents. That thought was not a happy one either.

The presiding judge was Falconbridge, a man Murdoch had encountered once or twice when he'd had to testify in court. He was a sharp-beaked old fellow, who either tried to live up to his name or had been shaped by it, and he had the reputation of being both shrewd and irascible. His concluding instructions to the jury were incisive. It was extremely unlikely they would bring in a contrary verdict if Falconbridge considered the accused to be guilty. He had obviously so considered.

The defending counsel was a solicitor named Clement, who as far as Murdoch could tell had done a competent, if uninspired, job. The prosecuting counsel was Greene, and Murdoch knew of him from reputation. Word was Greene would as soon shoot himself as lose a case. You might as well fly the pit; save yourself the time. In that respect and given that John Delaney was described as a worthy pillar of the church and a devoted family man, the odds had been against Harry. Murdoch knew how the men on the jury were wont to feel about strangers. Some of them would have known Delaney personally. From their point of view, a culprit had been apprehended and why should they look further.

He took one of the sheets of paper and began to write notes.

He must have been at it for more than an hour when Massie returned. Tyler was right behind him carrying a tray.

"Mr. Murdoch, I am about to take my luncheon. I usually do so at my desk, and I wondered if you would join me?"

"I would appreciate that, sir, and if I could trespass on your time, there are some questions I'd like to ask."

Tyler, who seemed to act as much as a butler as a guard, put his tray on the desk, and began to unload plates and soup bowls. Massie sat at his desk, and Murdoch took a chair in front of him. Tyler moved over a second small table.

"Thank you, Tyler. We'll manage ourselves now."

Luncheon consisted of some kind of thin vegetable broth and slices of bread and cold mutton.

"I take my meals from the kitchen," said Massie. "I believe that the men in my care should not be indulged, neither should they be treated as vermin. They receive a plain but nourishing diet."

Murdoch sipped at the tepid broth. Plain it was. He didn't know about nourishing. It tasted like some kind of turnip.

"Please ask your questions."

Murdoch consulted his piece of paper. "What I have done is extrapolate the main points in the evidence against him. First, there was the bruise on his right cheek. He says he fell, which is plausible given he was full of liquor."

"That is true but does not account for the corresponding graze on Delaney's left hand."

"Point taken. Second, with regard to the blood on Harry's sleeve and the front of his shirt. He says his dog was bitten by the rats, and he got the blood on him when he picked him up. Did anyone examine the dog to see if it was injured?"

"Not at the time and when the case came to trial, if there had been an injury, it was long healed." Massie wiped his mouth with his napkin. At least the china and the linen were befitting his position.

"The fact that he was in the ravine at all was, of course, most suspect. It certainly suggested he had been lying in wait for Delaney, who had to go that way to get home."

"Quite so."

"I suppose there is no doubt that money was missing?"

"None at all. The hired man at the tavern has a head for figures. It was he who brought the matter to the attention of the prosecution, otherwise it might have been overlooked. Lacey kept an exact record of the wagers and what was won and lost and remembered exactly. Delaney left with almost

one hundred dollars, and that was not the amount in his pouch.”

“To be exact, he won ninety-four dollars and seventy-two was found in his pouch. Twenty-two dollars unaccounted for.”

“Mr. Clement couldn’t get Lacey to budge an inch on that.”

“He tried to suggest that Delaney had taken out his money to count it, and some bills blew away. It sounded like a ludicrous proposition to me.”

“It was and it lost him credibility. The jurymen actually laughed when they heard that.”

“There was no search conducted at the time, I understand.”

Massie waited until he had swallowed his piece of bread and could speak without his mouth full. “Not for the money. As I say, nobody knew it was missing until shortly before the trial. The constables were looking for a murder weapon, and that was soon discovered close to the place where Delaney was found.”

“Mr. Greene was determined that Harry had hidden the money intending to return for it later, but if so, why didn’t he take the entire pouch?”

“On that matter, Greene was most persuasive. He suggested that Harry tried to make the whole thing look like an accident by rolling Delaney into the creek. He took only a small sum of money, hoping it would not be noticed. He did not count on Lacey having such an excellent memory. Of course, jurymen are never sympathetic towards men who won’t relinquish stolen goods, and it didn’t help Harry’s case that the money was not recovered.”

“Speaking of excellent memories ... The witness, Mr. Pugh, is another man in possession of such. Even in the midst of the shock of finding Delaney, sending the boy for help, and so on, he was able to remember exactly what the accused said.”

“Ah yes. ‘He got what he deserved,’ wasn’t it? The prosecutor could paint Harry as a remorseless and vindictive killer. According to the coroner, Delaney was killed by at least two or three severe blows to the back of the head. His torso also showed several bruises. As I recall there were clear impressions of boot tips, as if he had been brutally kicked by somebody in a rage. Harry was wearing boots. His anger was not in question.”

Murdoch tried to eat some of the mutton on his plate, but it was greasy and unappetising. He stayed with the buttered bread, which had been sliced in thick pieces.

“The question of course is, if Harry Murdoch did not murder John Delaney, who did?”

“Quite so. There were no other applicants, as it were.” Massie smiled at his own joke then glanced rather anxiously at Murdoch. He did not want to appear tasteless. Murdoch answered his smile.

“No, there weren’t. All the other people present at the match were accounted for. The only hole here is the absent Mr. White, who seems to have disappeared. Advertisements were placed in the newspapers, I understand, asking for him to come forward and testify at the trial, but he did not appear.”

“That is not necessarily a sign of culpability. He may not have seen the advertisements, and the trial itself did not receive a great deal of attention in the newspapers. He might not even be aware that a murder occurred. And the two Craig gentlemen did vouch for him. They were clear they saw him heading towards Yonge Street.”

“It is not totally out of the question that Delaney encountered someone else who had not been present at the tavern, who might even have been a complete stranger to him.”

Massie’s expression was kind. “That is true but I’m afraid not likely. If Harry Murdoch were not so obdurate about

declaring his innocence, there would be no such debate as you and I are having.”

Massie reached for a small silver bell that was on his desk and gave it a brisk ring.

“I’m afraid I must be about my duties, Mr. Murdoch. I have taken all the time I can allow myself. Are you in any way satisfied?”

“As you say, the evidence does seem irrefutable. But I would like to speak to the prisoner again if I may.”

“Of course. You can do so at any time as long as it does not interrupt the routine of the prison.”

The guard entered the room. “Tyler, will you see if the prisoner, Murdoch, is available. The detective wishes to speak with him.”

Tyler went to collect the luncheon plates. “And by the way, please give my compliments to the cook. A most delicious soup.”

Murdoch thought the warden had been eating prison fare too long.

Chapter Fifteen

ADELIA CRAIG WAS HAVING DIFFICULTY with her recitation piece. Each student in the class was to present two verses of the popular poem "In the workhouse: Christmas Day" at the Christmas recital. Adelia had been assigned part of the first verse and the third from last, but the first wasn't giving her enough scope to use the large dramatic gestures she thought her teacher liked, and the other was so sad she kept wanting to cry.

She tried again. She straightened the strip of carpet, which she had put in front of the piano as her stage. Her teacher, Miss Hamersley, insisted that her students treat every practice as if it were a real recital. This meant the walk onto the stage, *the walk is a mirror of character*; the recitation itself, and the final bow and retreat. Adelia took a deep breath and assumed an *active chest*. She widened her eyes slightly and tried to summon a few animated thoughts. *Bright face, always a bright face, nobody wants to see a pudding*. Adelia usually had difficulty finding lively thoughts as worry was always uppermost; and even though she liked her lessons, they were another source of anxiety. She dearly valued the good opinion of Miss Hamersley, and it was always hard won.

She inhaled deeply, pushing her chest out rather like a pouter pigeon, neck stretched upwards, head gracefully balanced. Her chin tended to recede, and she had to remind herself to thrust forward slightly to compensate. She bared her teeth in a ferocious smile and walked across to the centre of the carpet. Miss Hamersley was critical of Adelia's walk, which she declared to be too timid and indecisive.

“Your audience wants to believe in you, Miss Craig. They are not going to listen to a young woman who looks as if she is about to turn tail and run out off the stage at any minute. Now, deep inspiration, assume active chest, and proceed.”

First, Adelia took up position one. Her weight was on her left foot, right foot obliquely in front, heel a few inches from the other foot. She remembered to curl her hands gracefully at her sides instead of clenching them nervously as she was wont to do. She began the recitation, her right hand moving to her heart.

*It is Christmas Day in the Workhouse,
And the cold bare walls are bright*

Both arms extended horizontally, palms up.

*With garlands of green and holly ,
And the place is a pleasant sight;
For with clean-washed hands and faces ,
In a long and hungry line
The paupers sit at the tables ,
For this is the hour they dine .*

She indicated the paupers as if they were lined up in front of her in a row. Her forefinger and thumb were parallel, fingers slightly cupped.

Skip to the end of the poem. The poor man was denouncing the hypocrisy of those who had denied his wife entrance to the workhouse.

*Up to the blackened ceiling
The sunken eyes were cast -
I knew on those lips all bloodless
My name had been the last;*

Hands clasped on “cast,” head back and eyes up in supplication. She stopped. How should she move to “lips all

bloodless"? Better not to overdo it. Miss Hamersley didn't like her students jumping round like acrobats, as she put it.

Adelia said the line again. "I knew on those lips all bloodless" - a frown here. Fingers extended, slightly open and touching her lips on "bloodless."

She'd called for her absent husband ...

Hands cupped around her mouth, head turning from side to side.

O God! Had I but known -

Had called in vain and in anguish

"Anguish" was not quite as easy to depict as one might think. Miss Hamersley liked them to be original. Finally she decided to show anguish by bringing her right hand, clenched, over her heart and sort of collapsing inward as if she had been hit by a cold wind.

Had died in that den ... alone .

On the final line, she raised her shoulders, stretched out her arms, and slowly brought her hands together in front, pressing fingers together in prayer. She held her position for the count of three, then as the audience burst into rapturous applause, she took her bow. Right foot back into second position, bend forward slightly, bring right toe to the heel of the left foot and bend the knee, pressing firmly against the back of the left knee. She was still in a bow when the door opened and her brother entered.

"Bravo, Leila, bravo."

Embarrassed, she straightened up.

"Were you practising your piece?"

She nodded.

"When am I going to see it?"

"I told you, at the Christmas recital."

"Show me now. It will be a good rehearsal."

Adelia hesitated, not at all sure if James would be a kind audience or not.

"It's not ready yet."

"Suit yourself."

He went over to the mirror and fiddled with his Windsor tie, a new green-and-red-plaid silk.

"My, aren't we a swell this afternoon," said Adelia. "A little extra macassar oil, a new cravat, and very shiny shoes. Going calling, are you? Miss Delaney, I assume?"

"Don't tease me, Adelia, I have no stomach for it today."

"I'm merely making an observation. This is your typical courting apparel."

"I would hardly say I'm courting. She is pleasant and I enjoy her company."

"So you say. On the other hand, you do seem to have a predilection for rather dull farmers' daughters."

"She's not and I don't." He frowned at her. Adelia was wearing a green velvet wrapper, and her fair hair was still in a loose bedtime braid.

"It's late not to be dressed, isn't it? What if we have visitors?"

"Like whom? The only people who come here are the butcher, the baker, or the candlestick maker, and Aunt Carmel attends to them."

"I thought you said Mr. Pugh was coming this afternoon."

"He doesn't count as a visitor. He wants to sell me some books."

"The way he was attending to you last week, I had the distinct impression he had more on his mind than *Woman: Maiden, Wife, and Mother*."

James came closer to her and whispered in her ear. "On the other hand, maybe that was exactly what he had on his mind, especially the wife part."

Adelia turned her head away irritably. "That's a stupid remark if ever I heard one."

"Leila, come on, admit it. You were quite enjoying his company. You were laughing."

"He had some clever magic tricks. They were amusing."

"Suit yourself." He planted a quick kiss on her cheek. "Well, I'd better be off. I'll leave you to your practice."

At the door he hesitated, looking over his shoulder at her. She looked so unhappy, he softened. "Do you want to come then? It might make things more agreeable if you do. Her mother or that lump of a brother are always lurking, and I can hardly get a moment with her alone."

"Thank you, but I do have a lot more to do."

"Are you still upset about the other day?"

"Of course I am. I hardly enjoyed testifying in a court of law."

"You shouldn't be concerned about that," he said with a grin. "You were splendid."

He switched to a girlish falsetto. "Why that old clock is so LOUD, Mamma is always complaining about it. I know for sure my father and brother came into the house at a quarter past eight o'clock exactly."

She smiled a little. "I did not sound like that. And the judge made me dreadfully nervous. I felt he could see at once I was lying."

"Of course he couldn't. Nobody could. You were cool as a cucumber. A lovely *English* cucumber, I might add. Your lessons are paying off."

"Just as I was stepping down from the witness box, I caught the eyes of the prisoner, the Murdoch fellow. He looked so afraid. I felt desperately sorry for him."

James came over and put his arm around her shoulder. "Why is it that everybody in this family is feeling sorry for the man? Save your pity. He's a murderer. And a brutal one at that."

She put her hand lightly over that of her brother. "I suppose you're right."

“Of course I’m right. But if it will make you feel better, you can go up to the police station and tell them what really happened. ‘I’m afraid I didn’t tell the truth. I did not see my father and my brother at all that night.’ ‘Oh dear, where were they then?’”

“Stop it. I know perfectly well where you were.”

“I’m glad of that. For a minute I thought my own sister suspected me of knocking some poor man over the head.”

“Don’t be silly.”

James looked at her for a moment; then he shrugged.

“I’m off. If Mrs. Delaney invites me to stay for dinner, I shall accept.”

“In which case, I shall see you in the morning. I plan to go to bed early.”

She waited until the door closed after him, then she stood up, moved to the centre of her improvised stage, and addressed the empty chairs in front of her.

*There, get ye gone to your dinners,
Don’t mind me in the least*

For the first time, she raised her voice. The effect was so satisfactory, she did it for a second time then took her bow.

Chapter Sixteen

HARRY HAD GOT THERE BEFORE THEM and was sitting at the table with his hands correctly placed between the table markers. He made a worse impression on Murdoch this second time. There was a pale sunlight coming through the windows, but it yellowed his face, which Murdoch remembered as always ruddy from the weather.

Murdoch took the same chair as before, opposite him. "Do you want another pipe?"

"I'll never refuse that."

The guard was hovering expectantly close by.

"Can I offer you a bowl as well, Mr. Barker?"

"Thank you, sir."

Murdoch handed his tobacco pouch to the guard. "We'll be quite all right here. You probably could do with a change of scene." He winked.

"I could that." Barker stuffed his pipe to capacity, then passed the pouch on to Harry.

"I'll just have my smoke in the corridor outside," he said, and he left them alone. Murdoch waited while his father went through the ritual of pipe stuffing and lighting up and the deep, satisfying draw. There was a moment of awkward silence, then Harry pushed some sheets of paper toward him.

"Take a look."

They were pencil sketches, all of boats, on the beach, in heavy seas, a couple of interiors.

"Do you recognize the *Bluebell*? I was going by memory, but I spent enough time in her so she came to mind real clear."

"Yes, that one particularly. They're good." Murdoch knew his tone was grudging, but he couldn't help himself.

Harry gathered the papers together. "You've got a look on your face, Will. Hasn't changed since you were a nipper, that look. You've had a chance to read the trial report then?"

"I have."

There was a flash of anger in Harry's eyes. "Are you planning to tantalize me, Will? Keep me dangling on the line while you decide whether or not I'm a keeper?"

"It's not that at all. That's not why I was hesitating. I don't know where to start."

Harry showed his teeth in what was probably meant to be a grin. Murdoch saw that one of his side teeth was chipped, something he hadn't noticed before. "Come on then. All of it. Are you going to condemn me, too?"

"There's strong evidence against you."

Harry thumped on the table. "You've got me tight by the balls, haven't you, Will. You're just going to squeeze a little now and again just for the pleasure of seeing me wince. Well, I'm not going to do it. I know there's been bad blood between us, and you haven't forgot it. Maybe we've got to get that out of the way before we go any further. Or are you enjoying it too much? You're finally getting your own back." His eyes had darkened in a way that Murdoch was all too familiar with. He leaned forward. For all the world he looked as if he were about to challenge his son to an arm wrestle. In spite of the inactivity of the jail, he still had the broad shoulders and thick forearms of a fisherman. It was all Murdoch could do not to flinch. His heart was pounding in his chest, and he wasn't sure his legs would hold him if he stood up. He felt as if he had been deluged with scalding water, and in spite of himself he was that boy again confronted with his father's rage, an anger that had felt murderous to him then and even so now. His fear was quickly followed by his own fury.

“Why should I believe you’re innocent? Answer me, Harry? Why should I? You say you don’t remember anything after you left the tavern. Shall I remind you what you were like when you had tossed back a few? You liked to come out swinging. At me, Bertie, even Ma. And the next day you couldn’t remember a bloody thing.” He was leaning forward now, his face close to his father’s, forcing him to meet his eyes. “Why should this be different?”

Surprisingly, Harry didn’t respond in kind. He averted his face.

“Because it is. I’d know if I killed somebody. I’d remember that.”

“Well, let’s try digging into our memories, shall we? Do you recall picking up a piece of tree branch and whacking the man across the back of the head?”

“No, I do not.”

“Whacking him so hard his skull split? Then maybe a recollection of kicking his body as if he was a sack of potatoes? And all because you thought he’d cheated you. Is it coming back to you now, Harry?”

“No!”

The door opened and the guard peeked in. “Everything all right, Mr. Murdoch? Do you need help?”

Startled, Murdoch realised he had been shouting. “No. Thanks. Harry and I are just getting down to brass tacks.”

“Keep it down then. You sure are loud.”

“Some things need to be said loud, Mr. Barker.”

The guard grimaced and went back to the corridor. The interruption, however, served its purpose, and Murdoch was able to regain some control. Harry was sitting very still, his hands in front of him. Then he spoke and his voice was taut with emotion. “Don’t you think I’ve wondered that myself? If it is true I committed a murder, I want to know. I’d like to prepare myself to face my Maker.”

Murdoch almost laughed out loud but was stopped by the expression on his father’s face. He meant what he said.

"I've been thinking about little else since I've been in here. But I just don't think I could have done such violence. Even if I felt it, I was too full. I could barely walk by that time. I wouldn't have had the strength to hit him like that."

This was the only point that Murdoch had thought was in Harry's favour when he'd read the trial report. The blows that Harry threw around were easier to dodge and feebler the more drunk he was.

"What do you think I can do at this late stage?"

"I don't know. You've ended up in the police force. You'll know what to do."

His pipe had gone out, and he fiddled with the matches to get it going again. Murdoch let him have a draw first.

"This man, White. The one who vanished. What was your impression of him?"

"Ah, you've hit the nail on the head, Will. I begged and begged my counsel to search for him, but he always gave me tepid answers. 'We've advertised in all the newspapers,' was all he could come up with. I told him the man was a city swell, which was a mistake. That made him stop looking right away. If I'd said he was a navvy or a clerk, he'd have gone all out to find him."

He bit hard on the stem of his pipe. "Besides, I was a charity case and that slows down the enthusiasm right there. I didn't have no money to pay a lawyer, and beggars can't be choosers."

"He seemed to do a competent job, as far as I could tell."

"He was a hack. I needed somebody with spirit."

"Wishful thinking aside, do you consider White the kind of man who would kill somebody?"

Harry shrugged. "Why not? He was what I'd call a hungry bettor. They won't stop till they've won or they're broke. He didn't win nought that day. Maybe he believed Delaney was a cheat which he was. I know the Craigs said he was heading off in the other direction, but it would have been nothing to turn back and go in search of Delaney."

“What did he look like?”

“Young fellow, not thirty I’d say. Medium sized, brown hair, whiskers. It was obvious from the way he was dressed he was a swell from the city. Gold cuff links, stickpin with a diamond, the lot.”

“A professional man?”

“Probably. I’d say a banker but could even be a doctor or a solicitor.”

“Did he introduce himself? Give a Christian name?”

“Not to me. I wouldn’t be surprised if White isn’t his real name.”

“I thought I’d try to find him. See what he has to say.”

Harry reached out and placed his hand on Murdoch’s. His skin was hot and dry, and it was as if a bolt of electricity shot through Murdoch’s fingers. “We don’t have much time. You might not believe me, Will, but I’m a better man than I was. Being in jail gives you a lot of thinking time. These last few months being cold sober has made me face up to a few things. I mean it when I say to you that I want to know truly if I have murdered a man. I’ll die repentant for that if it’s true. If it’s not, then I’d like the opportunity to make amends for the life I’ve led up to now.”

Murdoch wanted to sneer. This was the typical drunkard’s remorse, as lasting as a piece of milkweed fluff, blown away by the next thirst. But there was sincerity, fear, and a look he could only identify as yearning. Harry wanted something from him, and it wasn’t only help. He wanted his son to love him.

Chapter Seventeen

THE MANCHESTER TAVERN WAS LOCATED at the far end of Shaftesbury Avenue, and Murdoch walked back from St. Clair Avenue and Yonge Street, which was as far as the streetcar terminal. He was glad of the exercise. Within the space of four days, his life had undergone an irrevocable and cataclysmic change, and he felt the need to sort out both his thoughts and feelings. He didn't know when it would be the right time to tell his father that Susanna was dead. The recent meeting had been cut off abruptly. Tyler had come in and said Harry had to return to his cell at once. There had been some sort of barney in the exercise yard, and the warden was confining all prisoners in their cells until he sorted out what had happened. As he stood up to follow the guard, Harry called out, "Find out what's happened to my dog, will you. He's a game little fellow. Name of Havoc."

He wondered what Harry's reaction would be when he did tell him about Susanna. The new Harry, that is. The one with sensibility. When they were growing up, his father had not shown any more tenderness towards his daughter than he had to the two boys. He didn't hit her, but he did bark out orders or angry reprimands if she wasn't fast enough bringing him what he wanted. She had wept with the rest of them.

Murdoch's stomach felt tight and on the verge of queasiness. Although he didn't want to think about the expression on his father's face when he was leaving, it kept jumping back into his mind. The raw nakedness of Harry's longing was shocking. His father's physical nakedness had been easier to witness. Winter and summer, when he

returned from a fishing trip, Harry would strip down in front of the fire before stepping into the tub of scalding hot water his wife had ready for him. Will had sat and watched him, and one time when he was almost ten years old, Harry had caught an expression on Will's face that had made him chuckle. He was enjoying the boy's nervous curiosity. He hadn't needed to say anything, but Will knew what it was all about and had hated the power his father held over him. After that he'd developed the ability to feign indifference.

He halted in front of the tavern, a long, squat building sitting alone in a patch of waste ground. In its first life it must have been a warehouse associated with the Canadian Pacific railway yards, which ran along the south side of the street. However, the ochre-painted walls were in good repair and the black trim fresh and shiny. On either side of the double doors were two urns, empty now but no doubt filled with flowers in the summer. In the English style, there was a hanging sign on which was painted a muddy-looking picture of a little brown-and-black dog, smooth coated, with sharp, pointed ears and spindly legs. Its front paw, the claws tipped with blood, was holding down a black rat. Printed in bold red letters was THE MANCHESTER TERRIER .

There was smoke coming from the chimney and lamps lit. He could see a woman, plump and dark haired, moving about in the kitchen. A large room took up the other half of the building and was obviously the taproom, with its long tables and benches. There was a big stone hearth at one end, but there were no customers warming themselves. He assumed the tavern was closed until the evening.

He continued walking. The macadamised street ended abruptly about fifty yards on and narrowed into a dirt path that disappeared in a stand of pine trees. There were no other buildings, and the fence opposite demarcated the end of the railway property. He followed the path through the

trees to the brow of the hill and stood looking down into the ravine. A blustering wind stung his face.

Beginning slightly to the south of St. Clair Avenue, the land was cut by a series of faults that ran down almost as far as the lake, like gigantic sabre slashes. These ravines weren't especially long or deep, but they were rough and thickly wooded and afforded dramatic terrain in the otherwise bland landscape, a reminder of the primeval forest so recently tamed.

Murdoch paused. In the summer the trees would be thick and lush, but now they had lost most of their leaves. The spruces and other evergreens were abundant, but he could see through the branches sufficiently to glimpse a narrow wooden bridge at the bottom of the hill. He fished his watch out of his waistcoat pocket and checked it. Ten minutes past two o'clock. He began to make his way at a steady pace down the path. The ground was hard and dry, but small drifts of snow had been captured in the ruts, which made the way slippery.

"Ahh!" He lost his footing and slid down in a rush to level ground, where he lay momentarily, feeling irrationally angry at the fall as if the earth had vindictively attacked him. A black Junco lighted on a branch nearby and twittered, cocking its head to look at him.

"Haven't you seen anybody fall on their arse before?" he asked the bird in mock anger. "Humans do it all the time, you know." The blackbird darted away.

Murdoch brushed some snow off his trousers and got to his feet. Down here the wind was less fierce. It was private and protected. Even with the denuded trees, the branches were thick; in the summer he would be completely invisible. He checked the time. It had taken only six minutes to descend from the top of the hill. Add four minutes from the tavern. Ten minutes more or less from there to here.

He walked onto the bridge and leaned over the railing. The creek was narrow and the banks sandy, about four or

five feet high. The little river would be frozen before too long, but now there was only a thin skin of ice at the verge, the centre running freely. Just ahead, the path forked, one branch went to the left and disappeared around the bend of the hill. The other continued further along to the right then it too vanished as it wound its way up the hill. The railway bridge, the steel girders dark and slender, strode across the gap.

Murdoch took the right-hand path and walked a distance of about twenty feet. This was roughly the spot where Harry had been found lying in the thick summer grass. Delaney had been discovered in the creek further along. The banks here were higher than at the bridge but also sandy, and the rocks had been smoothed and rounded by the flowing water. He walked on a little further. The path he was on ran underneath the high railway bridge and seemed to be heading in the direction of Yonge Street. Then just around a slight bend, he came to a flight of steps, which zigzagged at steep angles up the side of the ravine. He began to climb upward.

He might have gone past the hideaway if he hadn't been on the lookout for anything out of the ordinary.

On the left-hand side of the path was a rocky overhang and around it a clump of bushes, too neat and symmetrical to be quite natural. He slipped underneath the railing, clambered around the slope, and peered through the bush. He was looking into a hollowed-out cave. Branches were attached to a weather-beaten piece of wood that blocked the opening. He moved it aside and crawled inside the opening. The space was surprisingly large as the sandy wall had been hollowed deeper underneath the overhanging rock and there was just enough room to sit upright. He squatted and hugged his knees. Quite cosy really. Old moss and leaves piled on the floor made a soft cushion.

He and Susanna had had a hideaway in a cave in the cliffs that they could only reach by means of a knotted rope. He

remembered the pleasure he'd experienced every time he crawled into that cold space and hauled up the rope, sealing off access. He sighed suddenly, flooded with bittersweet memories of his sister, timid, overly pious, and well behaved, but at rare times, carefree and a good companion. She'd loved to race him down to the seashore, and try as he might, he couldn't outrun her. It was probably the only way she had to triumph, and she relished it.

Perhaps he should have insisted on seeing her face. He could have broken through into that dark room and looked at her. He grimaced to himself. Too late now.

He turned his head in the direction of the steps, which were just visible through the protective branches. There was a rough shelf wedged into the bush roots and on it lay a heap of stiff, dried squirrel pelts and a skinning knife, quite clean. He touched the blade, which was razor sharp. Next to that was the nub of a candle and a box of lucifers. Tucked underneath the shelf was a cigar box, which was pierced with holes. He pulled it out and removed the lid. Inside was a tiny frog skeleton. Murdoch frowned. He knew what this meant. Years ago, a boy in the village had showed him something similar. He said his sister was in love with a lad who didn't want her, and she was trying to win his affections through spells. She had captured a live frog, put it in a box pierced with holes, and placed it in the middle of an ant heap. When she came back two weeks later, at the time of the full moon, the frog's flesh had been consumed by the ants and only the skeleton remained. One of the bones had the shape of a fish hook, which she had to contrive to fasten to the garment of the desired one, and he would come to her. "And did he?" Murdoch had asked. "In more ways than one," the other boy had replied with a leer. Gingerly Murdoch touched the tiny bones. The hooked piece had not yet been removed.

At that moment he heard the sound of a child crying, a grizzling kind of cry that usually tried the patience. Feeling

foolish at the thought of being found in the hideaway, he hurriedly replaced the box and crawled out. Above him on the hill were a man and a child. Because of the incline, they were moving carefully, the man holding the little girl by the hand. She was complaining, seemingly not wanting to be walking. They saw Murdoch and immediately the child halted, stopped whining, and shrank against the man, presumably her father. He gathered her into his arms, but Murdoch heard her wail. No words, just a frightened, high-pitched cry. The man pressed her head against his chest. He hadn't moved either, and Murdoch waved to him.

"Good afternoon," he called out.

The fellow started to descend, and Murdoch was struck by his wariness. The child had hushed, but as they approached he saw how she clung tightly to her father's coat as if she were a little wild animal.

"You startled us, sir."

"Beg your pardon, I was in pursuit of a, er ..."

He waved vaguely. Close up, Murdoch saw the man was young, ruddy complexioned. His eyes were intelligent enough but with the same air of caution he'd observed in his movements. He was a big man, with the wide shoulders and strong thighs of a labourer.

"I was just out for a walk," replied Murdoch.

"Lost your way, did you?"

"Quite so. Will these steps take me to Yonge Street?"

"They don't go anywhere except up to my cottage."

Murdoch turned in the direction of the wooden bridge. "And where does that other path lead to?"

"That don't go anywhere either, except to private property." He shifted the child so she could ride more comfortably on his hip. She whimpered and tried to burrow her face deeper into his coat. "Hush, Sally."

Murdoch rubbed his hands together. "You know what, it's colder than I thought. I think I'll turn back."

"Forgo your walk, you mean?"

Murdoch grinned. "Yes, I think so. A dram of hot gin might do no harm. I passed a tavern up there on the road. Would you recommend it?"

The man's face was still grim, but he said, "I'm going that way myself. I work there. I'd say the ale is as good as the Dominion brewery can make it, and the gin's passable. But if you're peckish, what we're famous for is home-grown bacon."

Murdoch fell in beside him, and they continued on down the steps. He guessed this must be the hired man, Walter Lacey. At the trial, his description of Harry had been caustic. A man to be avoided. A swarm of wasps would be less dangerous than him when he'd been drinking.

"Haven't seen you around here before. Did you come all the way up from the city to walk in the ravine?"

Murdoch hadn't set out with any particular plan in mind, but suddenly, it came ready formed. He knew he had to ask questions and have some reason to do so, but human nature being what it is, he thought it highly doubtful that he'd get much information if he revealed his true identity.

"As a matter of fact, I wasn't just out for a stroll. I am on a case."

"Is that so, sir? What kind of a case might that be?"

"I'm a detective and, er, I have a private client. He's lost his dog. That might not sound too serious to us, but he's an older gentleman and very attached to the little creature."

Murdoch wasn't comfortable lying, he never was, but he forged on, trying to sound as convincing as he could.

"He claims that he knows the name of the man who nabbed the dog. This fellow came by offering to do some handiwork; then the next thing he and the dog had gone. Pouf! He, my client that is, is offering a generous reward, and I am of course only too happy to pay for a person's time and information."

"What makes you think the dog is anywhere in this vicinity?"

“To tell you the truth, my client is a man of the Fancy. He likes to gamble. He trained the dog as a darned good ratter. He is convinced that’s why this man stole it, so he could enter it in some matches. He’d heard that you could pick up a game or two at the Manchester.”

“Is that so?”

“I’m not trying to fish out information from you, believe me. I’m dead against the gambling laws. If grown men want to wager, why shouldn’t they?”

Lacey shrugged. “It don’t matter to me.”

He was panting a little with the burden of carrying his child. He pried her away from his chest and put her on the ground, but she clung like a limpet to his trouser leg, another thin wail came out of her. She was wearing a white hooded cape of rabbit fur that looked too big for her. Murdoch crouched down and tried to meet her eyes, but he had to talk to the back of the hood.

“Hello. I’m sorry if I frightened you back there. I didn’t mean to.” There was no response, only a muffled whimper.

Lacey scooped her up again. “She’s not afeard; she’s shy. Don’t get to see many strangers.”

He didn’t speak until they were on the path, but Murdoch’s gesture seemed to have mollified him slightly.

“When did your client lose his dog?”

“A while ago. In the summer as a matter of fact. He’s been out of the country and hasn’t had a chance to look before. He said the man who took it gave him a name. Me, I doubt if it’s his real name, but he said it was. Merton, no that’s not right. Murdoch. Harry Murdoch.”

He felt the shock that jolted Lacey, who frowned at him, trying to read his expression.

“Is the name familiar?” asked Murdoch.

“Might be. Was the dog a scrubby little grey terrier?”

“I believe it was. He named him Havoc. Have you seen it around?”

“I have that.”

“With this man? He’s a tall cove, middle-aged. Thinning hair, brown eyes.”

“The dog was in the possession of such a person. He’s not now.”

“How so? Did he sell him?”

They were almost at the top of the hill.

“The man you’re talking about, this Harry Murdoch, he showed up here in August, but he murdered a man and if you want to talk to him you’re going to have to go to the Don Jail because he’s in there. The dog is being looked after by Mr. Newcombe, the innkeeper. He’ll probably be only too glad to get rid of him.” Lacey seemed in a hurry to end the conversation and quickened his pace. As they approached the tavern, he said, “We don’t open till five, but the missus will always find you a bite to eat. I’ll let her know. You can sit in the taproom if you want. Mr. Newcombe keeps a good fire going.”

He pushed open the door, and they stepped into a small, dimly lit hall. There was a delicious smell of roast pork in the air. Lacey set Sally down and pulled back her hood. Murdoch glimpsed a pretty child with dark eyes and wavy hair, but she noticed he was looking at her and she averted her eyes in fear.

“Come on, Sally. Don’t be so mardy. We’re going to see Maria.” Lacey’s voice was impatient, and Murdoch saw how the child withdrew from the harshness of it. “Go through there,” he said to Murdoch, indicating the door on the right. Then he hurried off down the hallway, almost dragging the little girl.

Murdoch went into the taproom, which seemed to be the entire establishment. The plank floor was covered with sawdust, which smelled newly laid. Along both walls were wooden benches with tables in front of them, and at the far end of the room was a hearth that looked big enough to roast an ox in. The fire was blazing, and he headed straight to it so he could warm his cold hands. On the mantelpiece

was a fancy black marble clock with a brass plate at the bottom inscribed with lettering he couldn't make out. He pulled out his watch to compare the times.

"That's ten minutes fast, sir," said a voice behind him. "I keep it that way because my customers tend to linger."

Murdoch turned around. A stout man in a publican's leather apron was standing in the doorway. Physically he resembled a jovial Friar Tuck, but the expression in his eyes was anything but benevolent.

"I understand you're in search of a dog?"

"Yes, I am."

The innkeeper stepped closer. Lacey was behind him, and Murdoch could see that he was holding an iron poker in his hand. He wasn't smiling either.

Chapter Eighteen

NEWCOMBE WHISTLED AND IMMEDIATELY a small dog trotted out from behind the Chinese screen that was across the corner of the room by the fireplace.

"This is Tripper," said Newcombe.

The dog was black-and-tan coloured, smooth coated, and her full dugs indicated she was suckling a new litter. There was a high-pitched chorus of squeals from behind the screen as her pups protested her absence.

"Say hello to our guest, Trip," said Newcombe.

The dog approached Murdoch and began to sniff at his trouser cuffs. He decided not to move and waited until she had finished her inspection. She walked all the way round him then came in front, sat, and offered her paw. Newcombe laughed with delight, and Murdoch saw with relief that Lacey lowered his poker.

"She's accepted you," said the innkeeper. He clicked his tongue at the dog, and she turned and jumped into his arms, licking his face as if they'd been parted for months. He held her close against his cheek, crooning to her.

"How's my girl? How's my little mother?"

The question seemed to remind her of her duties because she wriggled free, jumped down, and hurried off, disappearing behind the screen.

"D'you want to see the pups?"

Murdoch nodded. Lacey was still at the doorway, but the tension in the room had lightened considerably. Newcombe moved aside the screen sufficiently for Murdoch to see the basket where Tripper was lying on her side while four puppies rooted at her teats, sucking vigorously. She looked

up at the two men, but their presence didn't seem to disturb her and she gave another polite wag of her tail.

"She's a good mother is Tripper. This is her third litter. Big one this time. These dogs don't usually have more than one or two at a time." He replaced the screen. "We'll let her get on with it. She likes you," he added, and Murdoch felt absurdly pleased.

"She's a Manchester terrier, I take it. And you've named your tavern after her."

"One and the same." He indicated the bench closest to the fire. "Come and have a seat. Would you be hungry?"

"I am indeed, and that smell makes me salivate."

The innkeeper nodded to his man. "Bring him a plate, Walter. He's all right." Lacey left and Newcombe turned back to Murdoch and held out his hand. "I'm Vince Newcombe." He spoke in an English dialect of some sort. Not Cockney but like that.

"Williams, at your service."

"Is that your real name or one for now?"

Murdoch was taken aback. "I, er ..."

"Come on, sir. I'm no green fool, neither is my man. You're after telling us some kind of whopper. Walter thought you was a nark, but I always trust Tripper when it comes to being a judge of character. Never fails. She can tell if a man is lying, and she can smell fear a mile off."

Aware of how he felt when the two men had first come into the room, Murdoch considered Newcombe's faith in his dog was misplaced, but he just grinned.

"Walter tells me you're a private detective and you're looking for a stolen dog, but that don't make sense. Nobody would wait four months to go looking for their dog. Besides, Harry Murdoch was here more than once with that feist. He didn't steal it." He laid his forefinger along the side of his nose, cocking his head. "I know what you are. I knew the minute I clapt eyes on you, you weren't no frog. Them's a shifty lot. I can always tell them. I bet you'd be with the

newspaper. The man you mentioned, Harry Murdoch, was convicted just two days ago. The papers are probably after stories. You're a newspaper reporter."

Murdoch shook his head, preferring to keep as close to the truth as he could. "No, I'm not."

Newcombe looked as if he was prepared to argue the point. "You're sure about that?"

"Quite sure."

"There's no dog owner, I gather?"

"No."

"Didn't think so. I've got the dog myself. There wasn't anybody else to take of it. But he's a lot like his master is the pity, as mean as a snake. Bit me twice, almost killed one of the puppies when it wandered too close. I'm thinking of getting rid of it. I was just waiting to see the result of the trial."

Newcombe got up, went behind the screen, and emerged with one of the puppies. He put it on the floor, and it moved unsteadily towards him. He took a spindle of rolled paper from the mantelpiece and started to wave it under the puppy's nose. The little terrier pounced on the paper, and Newcombe jerked it out of the way just in time. "Hey, my fellow, a chip off the old block, aren't you?" He dragged the spindle again but this time he wasn't fast enough, and the pup grabbed it and tossed it into the air. Newcombe looked over his shoulder at Murdoch.

"Well, are you going to come clean? You're not a nark. You're not a reporter. What are you then?"

"I really am a detective, but I'm working in a private capacity. I've taken on a client who wants it proved conclusively one way or the other that Harry Murdoch was guilty."

"Ah, working for the family, are you?"

"Yes, you could say that."

"What do you want to know?"

"Anything at all that relates to the case." He grinned. "What Tripper's assessment of Harry was? What's your opinion? Anything."

Newcombe sat on the hearth bench and bent over his own round stomach to play with the pup, dragging the spindle in front of him making growling noises. Murdoch waited.

"This investigation? Are you planning to do it honest? You're not just interested in smearing somebody else's good name, I hope. Throw dirt to confuse things."

"There is no point. I just want to know conclusively if Harry Murdoch murdered John Delaney."

"The twelve good men and true who sat on the jury said he did. What are you going to find out that they didn't?"

"Perhaps nothing, but at least I'll have tried." "For the family?" asked Newcombe, giving him a disconcertingly shrewd glance. "Yes, for the family."

For the second time, the innkeeper offered his hand. "Shake on that. I like loyalty. What have you got if you don't have family? By the way, is your name truly Williams?"

"Close enough."

"Ask away."

"I've read the record of the trial, and I know what happened, or what was said to have happened. Like I said, I'm interested in your own opinions."

"My opinion is that the man is guilty. He got himself drunk and lost his temper. I know I shouldn't say this, seeing as I earn my living as an innkeeper, but I've seen men take their liquor in every kind of way you can imagine. Some old codgers become sweet and loving as babes when they're full. Nocky farm lads become philosophers; lawyers act like fools. Men who in daily life are affable as can be turn into savages who've forgot every Christian principle they ever knew. They'd cut your throat soon as look at you."

"Would you consider Harry one of that sort?"

"I would. When he'd got to drinking, he was ready to pick a quarrel with the good Lord Himself if He was by."

"And when he wasn't drunk?"

"Can't say he stayed sober long enough for me to tell. Quiet I suppose. But it's interesting that you say you're working for his family. We did have a long chin back in April. I like to get to know my customers. I knew he was a widower and that he'd been a fisherman out East, but he never mentioned any family."

Murdoch couldn't resist. "He didn't talk about a son? Or a daughter?"

"Never said a word. Acted like he was all alone in the world, but he does have relations, you say?"

"Yes."

Newcombe teased the puppy again. Murdoch let that go on for a while.

"What about John Delaney? What kind of drinker was he?"

"He never took too much that I saw."

"You don't seem to have a category for that."

Newcombe checked to see if Murdoch was making fun of him. "No, I don't."

"You'd describe him as a good man then. Without any enemies?"

Murdoch registered the second's hesitation in his host. "None that I'm aware of. He paid his debts when he had them without bellyaching. He's got a good little feist though, so he rarely lost a match."

"What was Harry's reason for killing him?"

"Surely that's obvious. He'd lost the match. He was close to winning, but his dog choked at the last minute. A brooder that man. Terrible sore loser. He started accusing everybody of cheating him. None of it true. I run those matches clean as a revival meeting. His motive? Aggrievement. It's happened a hundred times before and will happen again as long as men are men. Dogs aren't like that. You'll never find a dog holding a grudge."

Murdoch headed him back to the issue.

"As I understand it, Delaney wasn't found for almost two hours. The accused man says he was passed out all that time. Didn't come to until he was being arrested. Could somebody else have come down the ravine path, had a barney with Delaney, then scarpered off under the railway bridge to Yonge Street? It would be so dark and woody down there in August, nobody would have seen him. Or them for that matter. Doesn't have to be just one person."

Newcombe pursed his lips. "I suppose that is a possibility, but I don't know who that could be. Everybody who was here is accounted for."

"A stranger? Somebody who wasn't at the match?"

"Not likely is it? You've seen the trial record you say?"

"Yes."

"Then you must know that there was a whole pile of evidence against your man. As far as I'm concerned, he was proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt, as they say."

He picked up the puppy, who had suddenly fallen asleep across his shoe. "Is that it then in the question department?"

"Any personal opinions about the other men, especially Mr. White, who never appeared to give witness?"

"Tripper liked all of them. Oh, she barked at Mr. Pugh at first but soon took to him after that. Mr. White struck me as a swell young man who would go to great lengths not to be mixed up with anything sordid. But I don't see him as a murderer."

"Not even in the heat of a quarrel?"

"In the heat of a quarrel I wouldn't swear for any man. Scratch this pup and you're not far from the wolf. We men aren't that much different."

"And the others? The Craigs? Mr. Pugh?"

"Good men one and all. Corinthians as Mr. Craig calls them."

"And none of them change character when they're full?"

But that joke had gone too far, and Newcombe frowned. "Moderate drinkers all of them. Mr. White, too. Now if you'll excuse me, I'll see what's keeping Walter with your meal."

The mantel clock began to bong out the hour. Halfway through it slowed down, wheezing like an old man. Newcombe walked over, took a key from underneath the clock, inserted it into the back of the clock and turned it a few times. With a great deal more vigour, the clock finished out its task.

"In terms of this investigation, as you call it, you don't have a lot of time, do you? The man's due to be executed on Monday morning."

Murdoch was surprised by the intensity of his own reaction. "I know," he said.

Chapter Nineteen

THE INNKEEPER SOON CAME BACK carrying a big tray. "Here you are, and I want this plate licked clean."

Murdoch wondered if he should bark a response. There was a large plate on the tray, loaded with succulent pork slices dripping gravy. The potatoes and cabbage were an afterthought. Newcombe put the plate in front of Murdoch and plopped down a mug brimming over with dark beer.

"The brew is homemade. It's on the house."

He stood to the side of the bench, arms folded across his paunch, and watched with satisfaction while Murdoch tucked into the food with many appreciative noises. Lacey was right; this was the best he'd ever eaten, even surpassing Enid's rabbit stew.

"Speaking of dogs, you might be interested in these photographs." Newcombe indicated the series of framed pictures that lined the mantelpiece. "This is Mr. Mahogany, my all-time champion. Died just last year at the ripe old age of thirteen. I put him to Tripper time before last. He was her grandfather, and I thought they'd produce a fine litter. Only two pups though, both stillborn. I suppose the poor fellow was too old."

Murdoch regarded the photograph, a black-and-tan dog, with ears pricked, head alert, looking out to the side of the picture.

"He looks like the dog on your sign."

Newcombe was pleased. "I painted that sign myself, using Mahogany as a model. Turned out pretty good if I do say so myself. All my dogs are purebreds. I can trace Trip's lines

back through five generations. Best ratters you can ever hope to find. Here, look at this."

There was a shelf running the length of the rear wall with platters, photographs, and other paraphernalia. Newcombe was indicating a box with a glass front. Inside was an enormous brown rat.

"Mahogany caught that in the barn. Exactly as big as he was, but that didn't frighten him any. One pounce and done. It was one of the last things he did. I didn't notice at first, but the rat had bit him here ..." He opened his mouth and pointed. "Nipped him right on the roof of his mouth. It got infected and before I knew it he sickened and died. I've kept the rat just to boast about, and I was glad I did. It's my memento."

The innkeeper was clearly still upset.

"It *is* huge," said Murdoch.

"Biggest I ever seen." Newcombe replaced the box on the shelf.

Murdoch had got to the stage of mopping up the remaining gravy with a thick slice of fresh baked bread. "I wonder if you'd mind telling me what happened that night. I mean when Delaney was killed," he added hastily. "It's always good to hear direct from the horse's mouth."

Newcombe sat down across the table from him and launched into his story, which had the seamlessness of an oft-repeated tale. For Murdoch's benefit, he added much more dog lore, including a detailed account of each terrier's performance. However, with regard to the actual events, there was nothing substantially different from what Murdoch had already read in the trial records. He threw in one small check.

"You say that everybody had left except Mr. Pugh, and he was with you until the Delaney boy appeared. Was he in your sight the entire time? Did you go into the kitchen for instance? It doesn't take that long to run to the bottom of the ravine and back."

Newcombe chuckled. "You would have to be an Indian scout to get down there, do your evil business, and get back up here without a bead of sweat showing. It's true I went into the kitchen to fetch some grub, but he never moved. He was sitting right where you are, and I was right where I am."

"Why didn't you stay in the barn?"

"Phew. It was like a furnace in there. He wanted to come in here where it was a bit cooler, so we did."

"And your wife? Where was she?"

Newcombe stared at him. "Maria? Why do you want to know about her?"

"I'm just trying to nail down all the pieces. I noticed she wasn't called up as a witness at the trial."

"Wasn't no need. She wasn't in the barn at all. Lacey helps me serve at the matches."

Murdoch tried to find the right approach. He didn't want to risk alienating the innkeeper again. There might be a second test.

"While you and Mr. Pugh were in here, I presume your wife was in your private quarters."

Newcombe still looked suspicious. "She was. She's got enough to do during the week without spending her Sabbath day working."

"Of course" - he patted his stomach - "and if I may say so, well-deserved."

The innkeeper was mollified. "Not that she does get her day of rest all the time. There's always somebody giving birth or dying. No matter whether they're beginning or closing, they all ask for Maria. She's good with babies, and she's good with the sick."

Murdoch dabbed at his moustache with the damask napkin Mrs. Newcombe had provided.

"That evening was no exception. Walter's little daughter was taken ill. His wife brought her in. Quite hysterical she was, but Maria is as close to being a nurse as makes no mind. Jess, that's Walter's wife, is one of those women

who's as nervous as a sparrow. Always worried little Sally is sick. She overwatches that child something fierce. She's even worse now since she lost the one she was carrying a few months back. Right after the murder it was. Some people thought it preyed on her mind like it can do with women. Maria was carrying when Mahogany died." He sighed and rubbed his hands across his bald head. "The babe came to term, but was terrible sickly and didn't live to see out the week, bless his soul."

"I'm so sorry."

"Yes, he was our only one. Couldn't seem to get any others. Perhaps that's why I love these little dogs so. They're like my children." He got to his feet. "Give me your plate. There's a raisin pudding for a sweet."

Murdoch held up his hand in protest. "I can't eat another morsel; I'll burst."

Newcombe grinned. "I'll get Maria to wrap some up for you to take with you. Her pudding is a favourite with the customers."

"Thank you, I do appreciate that. Just a point of clarification if you don't mind. Mrs. Lacey arrived after everybody had left the barn, did she?"

"That's right. There was a storm coming up and they all cleared out in a hurry except for Mr. Pugh."

"Would she have come shortly after then? A few minutes? Half an hour? An hour?"

Newcombe shrugged. "Can't tell you that. Jess went straight in to Maria. Like I said, everybody does." He shook his head, but it was obvious how proud he was of his wife.

"And Walter Lacey, where was he after everybody had left?"

"He stayed to clean up the barn. He's not as scared of rats, dead or alive. I'm lucky to have him. I must admit they do make me squirm. And for all the fact she's laid out more people than you can count, my Maria won't tolerate a rat within ten feet of her."

Murdoch indicated the glass box with the monstrous stuffed rat. "Can't say I blame her."

"No, none of us knew anything until young Phil came running up to the door, yelling his head off that his pa was dead. It's a wonder the whole street didn't turn out, he was yelling that loud. Maria tried to keep Jess in the back, knowing how highly strung she is, but she had her hands full with the lad, who was screaming like a stuck pig."

"I suppose Walter tended to his wife then?"

Another sharp glance from Newcombe. "He had to go and fetch the constable."

Murdoch didn't want to press him. He sat back, rather uncomfortably full. "Bad business all round."

"It was. Not that I've suffered, I must admit. Folks get a morbid curiosity about murder. I've even had people coming up from the city asking to see the bloodstains. Anyways, let me get this plate back to Maria. I'll bring in the sweet and see if you can eat it."

He left with the now light tray, and Murdoch took the opportunity to loosen his belt a notch. He had a closer look at the stuffed rat. All was quiet from behind the screen; no puppy nightmares.

Newcombe came back into the room leading a scruffy grey terrier on a leather leash.

"Thought you might like to meet the dog that caused all the trouble. This is Havoc."

Murdoch peered at the terrier. Its brown eyes were partly hidden behind its hair, but they seemed keen and intelligent.

"Hello, little fellow. Too bad you can't talk. You could have the truth confirmed in a second."

Hearing voices had awakened the brood, and two of the puppies waddled out from their den. Immediately they came over to investigate the newcomer. Havoc lifted his lip and snarled. One of the pups halted, the other mistook this signal or foolishly decided to ignore it. He continued to

approach Havoc and lifted his nose to the older dog's muzzle to sniff at him. So quickly Murdoch didn't even see what happened, the puppy was flipped onto his back and Havoc was astride him, growling into his face. The pup squealed in fright. Tripper heard and before Newcombe could take action, she came rushing from behind the screen to rescue her pup. Teeth bared, she slammed her body into Havoc, knocking him off. There was a whirl of barking dogs as he retaliated or tried to get out of the way, Murdoch couldn't tell which.

Newcombe jerked on the leash, pulling Havoc up on his hind legs. "Tripper, leave it!" The bitch, feet planted, barked ferociously for a few more moments; Havoc, almost choking, answered her in kind.

"I said, leave it!"

Reluctantly, Tripper backed away, grabbed her pup, still squealing, by the scruff of its neck, and carried it back to the den.

"My Lord, he is a mean little brute," said Murdoch.

"To be fair, in this case, that little titch got what he asked for. Havoc warned him, and he wouldn't listen. Dogs are very strict on manners. But Tripper, of course, will protect her own to the death if she has to. He wouldn't have stood a chance."

"Would he have hurt the puppy?"

"It's hard to tell. Probably just wanted to scare him a bit. But you never know. Some males will kill the young ones at the blink of an eye. Here, make friends with him."

He thrust a dried piece of bacon into Murdoch's hand, who crouched down to offer the tidbit. Havoc took a cautious sniff and gulped down the bacon. Murdoch reached out his hand and tried to pat the dog's head. At once, Havoc curled back his lip, showing impressive canines. Murdoch jumped back.

"He is a bad-tempered cuss, isn't he?"

"It'll take time, that's all. Here, try again." He handed Murdoch another piece of bacon.

Havoc swallowed it hungrily, but Murdoch didn't make any attempt to pat him this time.

"There you go then," said Newcombe, and he handed the leather leash to Murdoch. "He's all yours."

"What do you mean?"

"I can't keep him. He's a good ratter, mind you. I've been using him in the barn. But Tripper wouldn't get along with him. As you're representing the family of his master, it makes the most sense that you take him. It would be a pity to put him down."

Murdoch was spluttering out his protest when the door opened, letting in a rush of cold air. Two men came in. One was an older man, elegantly dressed in a long, checked overcoat and brown fedora; the other man was wearing bicycling clothes. The lower half of his face was wrapped in a woollen muffler, and he had on large racoon gloves against the cold.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Newcombe," said the older man, and he tipped his hat courteously to the innkeeper and Murdoch. "Brisk out there. Very brisk."

"Come in and get yourself warm, Mr. Craig, Mr. Pugh," said the innkeeper. "Where's your lad this afternoon?"

"He's gone courting, I believe."

"Miss Delaney?"

"Yes. A very fine young woman, very fine."

He spoke with a pronounced English voice that sounded affected to Murdoch, although perhaps it was normal for the other man.

"Here you are, Newcombe. The broadsheet I said I'd do for you."

He handed the innkeeper a sheet of paper. Newcombe studied it with delight.

"Excellent piece of work, Mr. Craig. I do thank you. Look, gentlemen, what do you think of this?"

He held up the paper and Murdoch saw it was an announcement of a forthcoming "Yuletide party, complete with puddings and mulled wine. Sign up now. Only one dollar."

"Would you print up two dozen copies for me? I'll hand them out to the customers."

"I'll have them ready by tomorrow."

Newcombe took the broadsheet and fastened it to the mantelpiece by using the clock to hold it down.

"A bargain if I may say so, Mr. Newcombe," said Pugh. "I'll be here."

Both men moved closer to the hearth to warm themselves, each glancing at Murdoch with polite nods of greeting.

"It's good chance that you came just now," said Newcombe. "This gentleman and me were having a chin about the Delaney case."

"Indeed?" said the Englishman. "Is there anything else that can possibly be said?"

"Sentence was received day before yesterday. He'll be hung Monday morning." "Shame that," said Pugh.

"Shame he'll be hung, do you mean?" asked Murdoch. He hadn't meant his voice to be sharp, but it was and Pugh blinked.

"I suppose I did mean that. The whole thing shouldn't have happened. Tragic. Good man lost to the world."

"You must be referring to Mr. Delaney not Harry Murdoch," said Craig. "We can certainly do without his kind."

"What kind is that, if I may ask, sir?"

Before Craig could answer, the innkeeper intervened. "Gentlemen, allow me to make introductions. Mr. Craig, Mr. Pugh, this is Mr. Williams. He is a reporter, and he's writing an article about the case."

"Indeed?"

"Indeed, sir." Murdoch was struggling to calm down. It wasn't going to help his investigation to rile these men.

Pugh took off his glove and offered his hand. "Good afternoon to you."

Murdoch retrieved his fingers from the bruising squeeze. "And you, sir. I admire your courage to take your wheel on such a day. I put up mine two weeks ago."

"It's not too bad if you dress warm. What do you ride?"

"A Singer."

"Good wheel. Mine's an Ideal." "That's good, too."

He put out his hand to Craig, who accepted without much enthusiasm.

"What's your paper?" asked Pugh. "Beg pardon?"

"Who're you writing for? The *News*? The *Globe*?"

"Er, none so important. Just a small paper."

"Which one? Try me, I know all of them. Is it the *Orange Banner*?"

Blast! thought Murdoch. He could see the man was testing him, but why he was so persistent, he didn't know. Once again, Newcombe rescued him.

"He's keeping it confidential. Less prejudicial that way. Isn't that right, Mr. Williams?"

Murdoch nodded. Pugh seemed satisfied by that answer but didn't let go of the topic.

"Have you got a slant? You don't think the fellow was innocent, do you?"

Murdoch shrugged, on safer ground. "I'm trying to keep an open mind. As for a slant, as you call it, I'm going to let that emerge."

One of the puppies decided to test the world again, and he came out from behind the screen. Havoc jumped to his feet on the ready.

"Oh, dear. Glutton for punishment, aren't you," said Newcombe, and he picked up the puppy, gave him a kiss on his nose, and popped him back at the instance Tripper came to investigate. "You know where you are with dogs," he said. "Food, warmth, and respect is all they want. Not like men."

Craig smiled. "That sounds as if it could be the tack you need, Mr. Williams. The mysterious complexity of human nature. Tell me, Newcombe, are you raising more champions with this lot?"

"I have every expectation of so doing, sir."

Somehow the little incident released the tension in the air. Pugh sat down on the opposite bench; Craig stayed in front of the fire.

"Are you ready for your dinners?" asked Newcombe.

"I am. What about you, Mr. Pugh?"

"Wouldn't miss it. But a pint of your ale would go down smooth first off. I got up a thirst coming up the hill."

"I'll take your hats and coats, gentlemen, and I'll fetch the brews," said Newcombe. "In the meantime, please help yourself to cigars. There's a new box on the mantelpiece."

Murdoch waited until the two men were settled again. "I wonder if I could ask you gentlemen some questions as you were both present on the evening in question. Our good host here has been most forthcoming, but it always helps to verify statements."

Craig took a cigar and began the ritual of sniffing it, licking the end, and so forth. "Made a statement, did he? I thought you were just chinning with him. You make it sound like some sort of official inquiry." Behind the affable English manners, Murdoch sensed something sharper, something wary as a fox near the chicken coop.

"Figure of speech only, Mr. Craig." He didn't give the man a chance to argue further. "I understand that you, sir, left here with your son and a Mr. White, who has not been seen since. You were right on the heels of Delaney, but I assume he had already got as far as the ravine and you didn't see him - or anybody else for that matter."

Craig blew out some odiferous smoke. "It is so long ago and, frankly, was of so little moment at the time, I can hardly remember. But I do know my son and I took leave of Mr. White just in front of our house, which is on Summerhill

Avenue. He was heading for Yonge Street to see if he could find a cab. He didn't have his own carriage."

"I am intrigued by this person, White. Apparently he did not reply to any advertisements to come forward as a witness. Do you know who he is?"

"Not at all. Hadn't clapped eyes on him before."

"Some swell from the city, if you want my opinion," said Pugh. "Between you and me, Vince Newcombe has a good thing going up here. Them's high wagers. Nothing to sneeze at. Delaney was the big winner of course."

"And you the gracious loser, Mr. Pugh," said Craig. "Our friend here didn't win a single bet, Mr. Williams, but he didn't complain at all. One would almost think it didn't matter to him."

Pugh flushed. "Course it mattered, but I'm not going to whinge and moan when all was fair and square, won by better dogs."

"It would be hard *not* to find a better dog than your poor beast, Mr. Pugh. I don't think he is quite suited to ratting. The rodents seemed to frighten him out of his wits."

Pugh laughed. "You're right about that. But I thought I'd give it a try."

Murdoch thought Pugh was ill at ease with this conversation, but at that moment, Newcombe returned with two tankards of beer.

"Pork'll be ready in a trice." He addressed Murdoch. "Mr. Williams, I told young Phil Delaney I'd bring up one of the pups to show him. Flash is the sire, and I already promised them they could take one of the litter if they liked. Would you like to come up with me? Maria is going to take good care of these two gentlemen."

Murdoch stood up. "Thank you, Mr. Newcombe, I'd be happy to. And may I have the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Newcombe and giving my compliments on the splendid meal in person?"

"She'd like that I'm sure. Come through here."

Murdoch got his coat and went to follow his host out of the taproom. At the door he stopped. "What about the dog?"

Havoc was lying down with his nose on his paws, watching him. He looked forlorn, a scrap of a dog with his dull, rough coat.

"Better leave him here for now. He won't get along with Flash."

"Best of luck with your article," Pugh called after him. "I hope you get the slant you're looking for. Remember, human complexity."

"Thank you, sir. I will keep that in mind."

Chapter Twenty

WALTER HAD SET HIS DAUGHTER DOWN on the davenport, and she'd hardly stirred since. She had her thumb in her mouth and was clutching her rag doll tight to her neck, her eyes fixed on the door. *As if she was a little dog, waiting for her master*, thought Maria Newcombe.

She sawed off a few thick slices of bread from the fresh loaf she had baked that morning; cut one of the pieces in two and dipped it into the pot of gravy that was on the stove.

"Here, Sally, would you like a taste?"

The child shook her head, although to Maria's mind she looked pinched and hungry.

"It's good."

Another shake. "All right then, I'll have to eat it myself."

She did, chewing and swallowing the bread with appropriate sounds of enjoyment. Sally watched her solemnly.

Maria licked her fingers and wiped them on her apron. The little girl's eyes were dark like her mother's; her expression was perpetually wary.

"Now, now, Sally," said Maria, "you're too big a girl to be sucking your thumb. That's dirty."

She made an expression of disgust and took hold of Sally's hand to pry it away from her face. The child shrank back, resisting her. Maria decided not to persist. There was something about the look Sally gave her that was unsettling.

"Very well then. I've known children who sucked their thumbs, and they all ended up with a face that was out of

shape. They looked like weasel snouts. You wouldn't want that, would you? A pretty girl like you."

Sally removed her thumb from her mouth, but Maria didn't feel as if she had won a victory.

"That's a good girl. Would you like a bread dip now?"

Another head shake from Sally. Maria had to admit to herself that, try as she might, she couldn't take to the child; and she was a woman who loved children and was adored by them in return. Perhaps the problem lay with Sally's lack of response to everybody except her father. She was no chatterbox the way most children her age were; and when Maria was minding her, she mostly remained quietly on the sofa, playing with her dolly. Her mother had made it for her, and it was artfully done. The body was cut from a piece of Holland towelling and stuffed with soft bits of wool. Jess had painted a cheery face on the head and glued on dark brown wool hair that was tied into long braids. The smock was pale blue cotton with some pretty embroidery at the bodice. Sally had named it Pansy, and she sat by the hour talking quietly to herself as she played her games.

Lately Walter had been forced to bring the child to the tavern more and more when he was working. He didn't say much about it, just that Jessica was feeling poorly and he thought it better if Sally wasn't underfoot for a while.

Maria didn't really mind. She actually forgot the child was there sometimes she was such a mouse. She sighed. She couldn't really blame the poor scrap for the way she was. She was about to continue with her tasks when she was caught by the forlorn look on Sally's face. She certainly could do with some cheering up. Maria went over to the window seat and opened up the lid. In his rare leisure moments, Vince enjoyed working with his hands, and he had made some doll furniture for Sally. They had intended to give it to her at Christmas, but Maria thought the girl needed something jolly now.

"Here you go. Mr. Newcombe made these for you."

With some hesitation, Sally took the box and lifted the lid. Then her expression changed, and she smiled in pleasure.

"Do you like them?" Maria asked.

"Yes, ma'am." Before being prompted, she added, "Thank you very much, Mrs. Newcombe." She stood up and Maria offered her cheek for a kiss.

"They are made to fit Pansy. She can sit and have her tea like a princess."

Sally put the two wooden chairs and the table on the floor and propped the doll into one of the chairs. She fitted nicely, and Maria felt a glow of satisfaction. Making the furniture had been her idea.

"Can I play with the scrap bag?" Sally asked.

"You certainly can. You know where it is."

Sally trotted back to the window seat, and Maria returned to the stove.

The door to the kitchen opened and Lacey peered in.

"Two orders of pork and potatoes, if you please, Missus. One's for Mr. Pugh, and he wants extra crackling. The other's Mr. Craig's, and he just wants the usual, not too much gravy."

"Look, Poppa. Mrs. Newcombe gave them to me."

Sally was indicating the furniture. Lacey nodded. "That's lovely. I hope you're being a good girl."

"Yes, Poppa."

Lacey glanced at Maria questioningly. "She's doing quite all right, Walter. Hasn't mithered once today."

He looked relieved. "Thank you, Mrs. Newcombe. I do appreciate your help." With a quick glance at his daughter, he left. Engrossed in her game, Sally didn't put up a fuss.

Maria was happy to see the success of her present. Several minutes later, she looked over at the little girl. Sally was still seated on the floor where she had placed the miniature doll's table and chairs, and she hadn't stopped her game. She was flushed, and there was an intense

expression on her face that Maria couldn't quite decipher. She went over to her.

"Oh, dear, has Pansy been hurt?"

Sally nodded but immediately became sullen, not wanting the woman to intrude into her play.

"I have some ointment that will put her to rights," said Maria, and she bent down to pick up the doll. It was firmly tied to the chair, and she realised that what she had thought was an unskilfully applied bandage was, in fact, a gag that was tight around the doll's mouth.

"Sally, what in Our Lord's name are you doing?"

The door opened and Vince ushered in his new customer.

"Maria, Mr. Williams would like to offer his compliments."

Both men halted as the child suddenly scrambled toward the table, crawling on her hands and knees. Once in the shelter of the table legs, she curled into a ball, her thumb in her mouth, and began to whimper.

"My gracious, what's wrong with Sally?"

Maria put the toy chair with the bound and gagged doll on the table behind her.

"She's just being naughty. Don't take any notice."

She tried to muster a smile for the newcomer. She dearly hoped he hadn't seen what Sally was doing.

Chapter Twenty-one

MURDOCH AND NEWCOMBE , who had Flash's offspring tucked into his coat, trudged down the path towards the bottom of the ravine.

"Smells like it's going to snow," remarked Newcombe.

"It does that," said Murdoch. He was glad for his old sealskin coat. It had some worn patches and gave off a fishy odour in damp weather, but it was good protection against this kind of penetrating damp cold.

Newcombe glanced over at him. "It don't sit quite right for me not to call you by your proper name. Is there anything else I can use?"

"I'd be honoured if you'd call me Will. It's the name I was christened with."

"Done. I'm Vincent. It means a conqueror. Bit fancy for a plain fellow like me, but my ma believed in giving her children names above their station. My older brother was named Lucius, bringer of light." He spat to the side of the path. "Fat chance of that. Bringer of disaster and darkness more like. The younger one is Archibald. Well, I'd never say he was bold and brave; I'd say the opposite, but at least he hasn't destroyed everything he touched."

Newcombe's voice was cheerful as he related this history, belying his words. As if Murdoch had spoken, he went on. "You may well ask why I'm casting such aspersions on my own kin, but truth is they don't mean nothing to me anymore. I came across the mighty pond to get away from them all."

"Indeed," murmured Murdoch, with some sympathy.

"I might not be a conqueror in the exact sense of the word, but I've done all right for myself. Got the tavern going good. Got a respectable name in these parts, and that means a lot to me."

Murdoch assumed Maria Newcombe had the same views, and that was why she was so discomfited when they had come into the kitchen. He'd glimpsed the doll and had wondered what Sally was playing at, but he couldn't say he was shocked. When they were children, he and Susanna had acted out many bloodthirsty adventures with the few toys they had. On the other hand, there was something unwholesome about the child. Too much fear.

They had reached the bridge, and Newcombe stopped and peered over the railing into the stream below. "I believe nature can teach us our lessons if only we want to learn them. Look at this creek, for instance. Some men I've known are just like this little river. It don't appear deep, but it is. You wouldn't think it was dangerous, but it can be."

Murdoch joined him to look down at the water, which was flowing fast, swirling around the rocks. Bits of twigs and leaves dipped and danced on the surface.

"Are you speaking of any particular man?"

"No, I can't say I am."

However, Murdoch had the feeling the innkeeper was indeed referring to one person, but it was hard to know who that was. Maybe he meant Murdoch himself. He also had the sense that his companion was testing him. Throwing out a vague statement like that to see his reaction. *I'm testing myself*, he thought wryly. It was as if he were standing beside himself observing coolly. *Aha, that got to you, did it?*

They set off again. The path was deeply rutted with cart tracks.

"Delaney kept some cows. The milk gets driven down to the dairy on Summerhill twice a day. He doesn't do it himself anymore. His son, sometimes Kate, his daughter, does it." He paused as if choosing his words. "She'll be

needing a husband. Young Master Craig is courting her. I hope he's not playing fast and loose, 'cos she is stuck hard on him by all accounts."

"That so?"

Murdoch knew that if he simply made encouraging noises, Newcombe was going to tell him all the gossip, which he could sift and sieve for nuggets of gold.

"He's a good-looking young fellow, nice manners like his pa. But for some reason, Delaney took a scunner to him. Wouldn't let him call for no price. Gave out some cock-and-bull story that Kate was too young, which she isn't. In my opinion, Delaney was just acting like a cock of the walk and would have come round, but by all accounts, there was more than one big barney up at the house, girl screaming, mother in hysterics."

"Was the Craig boy upset?"

"Hmm. Don't know if I can say that. He didn't show it to me anyways. But the lassie was. Was going into a decline, according to all accounts. That's over now, of course. The flowers weren't hardly wilting on the grave when James went back a-courting."

"How has the family been coping?" asked Murdoch.

"As well as can be expected. They've always kept to themselves. Not Delaney. He was a jolly man most of the time, but his wife is a bit of a recluse. Only ever saw her at church, and then not all the time. His older children are both married and away. There's just young Philip and his sister."

"What are they like?"

Newcombe didn't answer right away. "Kate is normal enough in her brain, but ..."

Murdoch looked at him questioningly.

"I believe in love, don't get me wrong," continued Newcombe, "but the lass has gone to extremes. Comes from being kept too much at home probably. I heard she was sending young James presents every day. Oh, little things, a bunch of flowers, fresh eggs, a cravat; but too much of it."

Murdoch wondered who was the source of Newcombe's information, but he didn't want to shut him down so he didn't ask.

"But you said James Craig wasn't scared off. He's still her sweetheart."

"That's what I understand." He shrugged. "I mean, would you like it if a gal behaved that way around you?"

Murdoch considered the question. Liza had opened up her heart to him, but she hadn't showered him with gifts, just a special one on his birthday and at Christmastime.

"To be honest, I don't think I would. It sounds a bit on the desperate side, and I would be nervous about that being true love."

Newcombe smiled. "My thoughts exactly. I had to woo Maria for a long time before she agreed to have me. I liked that. Made me feel she didn't come too cheap."

The puppy whined and Newcombe turned him around into a more comfortable position.

"What about the young lad, Philip Delaney? What's your opinion of him?"

"He's a bit of a sad tale, you might say. He had a nasty accident a couple of years ago. He and his pa were bringing the milk cart down to the dairy when the horse spooked. The cart apparently hit a rut, and Phil was thrown out. Must have banged his head. He wasn't conscious for almost a week, and they thought he'd die. Unfortunately, it left him what you might call strange."

Newcombe hesitated. Murdoch prompted him. "In what way, strange?"

The other man shrugged. "It's as if he hasn't grown up, physically yes but not in his mind. And he has fits. Had one in the tavern not so long ago. Just fell on the ground twitching like a headless chicken. Good thing my wife was there. She knew what to do." He made gestures to illustrate Maria pulling Philip's tongue out of his mouth. "They can choke, you see."

The path was curving upwards around the side of the hill. The wind had blown away the snow except where it was caught in the clefts of the tree branches.

The innkeeper resumed. "Fortunately for Mrs. Delaney there was some insurance money, so she doesn't have to go begging. They rent out a cottage on the other side of the hill to my man, Lacey, so that's an income as well."

"Do the Lacey's ever use this path?"

The innkeeper looked at him curiously, and Murdoch grimaced. "You never know what will be relevant till you start."

"I can't say I ever enquired, but this is by far the easiest way. The other's closer, but you've got to climb all those darn steps." Newcombe patted his wide girth. "If it were me, I'd take the long way round any day."

"I discovered a cosy little hideaway over near the railway bridge on the way to the Lacey cottage. I wondered who'd built it?"

"It was likely Walter made it for Sally."

To their left, about fifty yards back and almost hidden in a stand of evergreens, appeared a small house. It was plain and unpainted.

"He owned that one, too," said Newcombe, pointing. "Mrs. Bowling rents it. She works for the Delaneys."

"A widow?"

"That's right."

Newcombe had an attractive lack of guile to him, but once again Murdoch sensed something else. He wondered if the innkeeper himself wasn't one of those deeper pools he'd been going on about.

They trudged on past a sloping field where three mud-caked cows chewed dispiritedly at a stook of hay. The Delaney house was visible on the crest of the hill and the path again divided, one fork becoming the driveway to the house, the other continuing on, he presumed, to the Lacey cottage. Lamps shone in both the upstairs and downstairs

windows, and a thin column of smoke drifted from the chimney.

"We'll go in the side door," said Newcombe, and he led the way through a wooden gate down a dirt path that ran alongside the empty vegetable garden. A wreath of intertwined willow wands and bedraggled black crepe was fastened on the door, and Murdoch could see the paint, once dark green, was peeling from the windowsills and eaves. A broken pane of glass in the door panel had been patched with cardboard.

Newcombe knocked and opened the door, which led directly into the large kitchen. The smell almost made Murdoch gag, something thick and sour. An elderly woman was standing in front of the large, black range in the centre of the room, stirring an enormous pot. Murdoch assumed the repulsive odour was coming from that.

"Good afternoon to you, Mrs. Bowling," said Newcombe.

She turned around. "My, didn't expect to see you today, Vincent."

Facing them, she didn't appear at all as old as Murdoch had at first thought. Her hair was iron grey and pulled up tight in a knot on top of her head, and she was quite stooped. However, her face was still smooth enough; and when she smiled at the innkeeper, she revealed good, unspoiled teeth. She had on a stained Holland apron that looked as if it would stand on its own from the amount of grease it had absorbed.

Newcombe pinched his nostrils with his fingers. "I surmise from the pong, you are boiling up the pig food?"

"Bad, is it? I'm so used to it, I don't notice anymore." They could hear a dog yapping excitedly, and the puppy inside Newcombe's coat gave a short, sharp reply and wriggled to get free.

"Hold on, you titch. In a minute."

Murdoch glanced around. There was nothing homey or welcoming about the kitchen. The flagstones were uneven,

and the only piece of furniture was a bare wooden table and a solitary chair. The range occupied most of the space.

"Missus is upstairs in the parlour. Mr. James and Miss Kate are playing duets. Love songs, no doubt."

She grimaced but whether that was because of the nature of the music or because the bubbling liquid in the pot spat out on her wrist, Murdoch was never to know. The door opened and a woman in the sombre clothes of close mourning entered.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Newcombe."

A small black-and-tan terrier, similar in appearance to Tripper, came dashing past her, yipping with excitement. He stopped abruptly in front of Newcombe, his head up, his little black muzzle quivering as he tried to locate the source of the new smell.

Newcombe tipped his hat to the woman. "Good afternoon, Mrs. Delaney. I've brought up Flash's whelp like I promised."

He placed the little dog on the floor. "Don't you piddle, you rascal, or you'll get me in trouble."

All four of them watched the two dogs for a moment as the pup licked at his sire's muzzle. Flash's response was quite different from Havoc's. He seemed to enjoy what the pup was doing. He sniffed in return, his tail waving.

"See, he knows it's his own flesh and blood," said Newcombe.

The woman frowned. "I don't know who's going to take care of another dog. Kate won't have anything to do with them, and I have too much to do just managing our affairs." Her tone was aggrieved.

"You don't have to keep him, Mrs. Delaney," said Newcombe. "I'd rather you didn't if it's too much. My agreement was with your husband."

She waved her hand dismissively. "We'll see. It might give Philip something to do with himself. Oh, darn that dog!"

Her remark was addressed to the little pup, who had squatted down and was rapidly making a puddle of water on

the floor. Newcombe whipped him up, holding him upended.

"I'll just be a minute."

He opened the door and hurried outside. Mrs. Delaney shifted her gaze towards Murdoch. She was not an attractive woman. Her widow's bonnet and short veil were too dark and severe for her face, with its heavy brows and full chin. Long-standing discontent had etched sharp furrows on her forehead and at the corners of her mouth.

"Good afternoon, ma'am. Mr. Newcombe kindly brought me with him on his errand. I do apologise if I am intruding at this sad time."

In spite of the mourning garb, in truth Mrs. Delaney did not look in the grip of sorrow. She appeared more querulous than sad.

"We haven't had many callers lately. They flock to you when they can feed like vultures off your ruin, but when it's apparent you're not going to collapse, they disappear."

Murdoch tried a polite smile. "I understand from Mr. Newcombe you do have a steady visitor in young Mr. Craig."

He was afraid he might have gone too far, but she looked mollified by what he said. Obviously she did not share her late husband's views on the relationship between James and her daughter.

"He told you, did he? Yes, it's true. The young people are quite attached to each other, I must say." She turned to the servant. "Mrs. Bowling, I was hoping for some tea by now."

"Sorry, madam, I had my other tasks to see to. I'll get on to it right away."

"Will you join us, Mr., er, I beg your pardon, I didn't catch your name."

"Thank you, ma'am. It's Williams and I would appreciate some tea indeed. 'Tis fair parched I am."

An Irish accent seemed to have suddenly taken over his tongue. He had no idea where it had come from. He was saved from further comment by Newcombe's return, the puppy tucked under his arm.

“All done.”

Flash jumped up at the sight of his offspring, and the pup greeted him ecstatically as if days instead of minutes had elapsed.

“Mr. Newcombe, we’re about to take tea. You can leave the dogs here with Bowling, and we’ll join Kate and her beau in the parlour.”

“Tell you what. I’ll just watch over them for a bit longer just to make sure they’re getting along; then I’ll help bring up the tea things.”

Mrs. Delaney considered him for a moment, as if ready to object on principle.

Flash was lying down by now, his paws outstretched in front of him. The puppy was trying to climb on his back, presumably intent on chewing his right ear. The innkeeper eyed them fondly, Mrs. Delaney with irritation. She nodded at Murdoch.

“Please come this way, sir.”

He followed her into the adjoining parlour. Mrs. Bowling was right about the bad smell. After a while you didn’t notice it. Only when he was in fresher air did he realise how repulsive it had been.

Mrs. Delaney led the way across to the far side of the room, negotiating her way through the heavy, old-fashioned furniture. There was a fire in the hearth, but it needed building up. Only one lamp was lit, the wick turned low. She drew aside the green chenille portiere covering an archway, and they went through to a second room. The air here was a sharp contrast to both the kitchen and the sitting room. It was cold with a slight smell of mildew. There was a threadbare Aubusson carpet on the floor, but no furniture at all except for one green velvet armchair and a small side table.

“My husband liked to sit here and smoke his pipe,” said Mrs. Delaney, and Murdoch wondered if it had formerly held

furniture or if Delaney liked the lonely splendour of an empty room.

She sailed ahead of him to the uncurtained door on the opposite side.

"You are probably thinking we are eccentric or too countrified for your city taste, Mr. Williams, but we prefer to have our sitting room on the second floor, where there is more sunlight."

"Very sensible," said Murdoch, who had thought no such thing and wouldn't have been able to differentiate country taste from the city if his life depended on it.

The door opened onto a flight of stairs at the top of which was a short hall. He could hear the sound of singing and an off-key flute.

"In here."

The couple had their backs to him, but they were directly in front of the fireplace mirror and he could see them clearly. A young man, fair haired and clean shaven, was seated at a music stand, a flute to his lips. Close beside him was a young woman, rather tall and thin, whom Murdoch presumed was Kate Delaney, she of the overwrought affections. She didn't stop singing or turn around, but Craig halted his playing and went to stand up.

"Don't stop please, James," said Mrs. Delaney, flapping her hand in his direction. "That is quite lovely. So accomplished."

He resumed his seat. Kate acknowledged their presence with a curt nod, then bent back to her music. Craig raised the flute to his lips, and his eyes met Murdoch's briefly in the mirror. Murdoch knew immediately they had met before. His name wasn't James Craig then; it was John Carey, and he was standing meekly before Colonel Denison, the police magistrate.

Chapter Twenty-two

AS QUICKLY AS HE REALISED JAMES CRAIG and he had met before, Murdoch saw that the young man wasn't aware of it. He couldn't blame him for that. At the time he'd been focused on the magistrate and what sentence he was about to pronounce. Murdoch had a nab whose case was coming to trial, and he was sitting at the back of the courtroom waiting to make his statement. He might not have paid much attention to Craig/Carey except that the plaintiff was sitting directly in front of him. She was obviously a servant, and her mistress, an elderly woman, was beside her. The girl was weeping ceaselessly in spite of the frequent admonitions of her employer, who appeared to be the one who had dragged the girl to court and insisted that Carey be charged with seduction. The young servant was with child, and her mistress wanted to make sure her seducer married her at once.

Carey was a handsome fellow, with full side-whiskers and blond moustache. He had such a winning smile and a glib tongue, it was easy to understand why an unsophisticated girl would be led astray. Murdoch was mildly annoyed at Carey for having misused his charms in such a way and didn't believe his repentant manner and his promise to make good. Obviously his pessimism had been justified. Carey had fled, either changed his name or assumed his real one, and it seemed was repeating his previous behaviour, this time with Miss Kate Delaney.

She was standing beside him, leaning forward slightly so as to turn the pages of the song sheet on the stand. There was such intensity in her body, Murdoch felt a pang of

longing. Not for her, but for what he no longer had for himself. He could read in her stance the intensity of her desires, how much she simply wanted an excuse to brush against the shoulder of the man in front of her.

Kate finished the verse, leaving Craig to complete a shaky trill on his flute. Mrs. Delaney applauded them with enthusiasm, and Murdoch joined in.

"Very fine, Miss Delaney, very fine indeed."

"Kate, this is Mr. Williams. He came up with Mr. Newcombe to deliver the puppy your father wanted. Mr. Williams, my daughter and her friend, Mr. Craig."

Murdoch gave her a rather fancy bow, then offered his hand to Craig. They shook hands in a firm, manly fashion, and Craig eyed him appraisingly. Murdoch watched for the *haven't-I-met-you-somewhere-before* expression to dawn on his face, but it didn't.

"Newcombe tells me you've got a good little ratter yourself, Mr. Craig." There was the Irish brogue again.

Craig grinned an acknowledgement, but before he could expound on the virtues of his dog, a young man who had been slumped almost out of sight in the window seat stood up and came over to them, hand outstretched.

"Don't forget me, Ma. You are always forgetting about me."

"Don't be silly. I was just about to introduce you." Mrs. Delaney's voice was placating. "Mr. Williams, my son, Philip."

Murdoch found his hand gripped in a painful crunch.

"How do you do, sir. I'm Philip Delaney, the youngest son of the house." He pumped Murdoch's arm.

"That's sufficient," said his mother, and the young man let go. He was plump with soft, womanish features. Like his mother and sister, he was in mourning clothes, a black suit that was too tight, as if he had puffed up recently and was trying to squash himself into clothes that were far too small. His chin, clean shaven, flowed over the high white collar. Up

close, Murdoch could see there was something abnormal in the young man's eyes. The pupils were almost erased in the blue of the irises, so that his eyes seemed to lack depth.

"I've ordered some tea to be brought up," said Mrs. Delaney. "Why don't you play another duet, Mr. Craig."

"That depends on my partner," said Craig. "Are you up for one more song, Miss Kate?"

"I'd count it an honour if you'd continue singing, Miss Delaney," said Murdoch.

Kate's sullen expression softened slightly, soothed by the wide Irish smile Murdoch was beaming at her. She turned her attention back to the song sheet. "Shall we start at the beginning, James?"

Murdoch sat down in the plush armchair by the fireside. Mrs. Delaney took the other. She picked up a fan from the side table and snapped it open. Philip wandered back to the window seat.

"Ready?" asked Craig, and he put his flute to his lips, gave Kate the note, and they resumed.

*Oh promise me that some day you and I,
Will take our love together to some sky.
Where we can be alone and faith renew ...*

The song wasn't one that Murdoch had heard before, but it was a good choice for their level of accomplishment. Her voice was thin but sweet enough; his accompaniment was rudimentary. Murdoch wondered if Craig had chosen the flute as his instrument because it meant he could cast soulful sideward glances at the singer. Murdoch thought he was grossly overdoing it, but obviously that was not Kate's opinion. He suspected Miss Delaney was not blessed with true beauty, but the intensity of her feelings had turned her into an attractive young woman. She was quite flushed, and her eyes were bright with the sheen of infatuation. She had obviously made an attempt to overcome the dullness of her

mourning apparel, and her black taffeta gown had white lace trim at the neck and sleeves. She had also twined a violet-coloured ribbon in her hair, and there was a frizz of fashionable curls across her forehead.

*... sing / Of love unspeakable that is to be. /
Oh promise me ...*

An intriguing line, thought Murdoch, given what seemed to be Craig's history. However, as they finished the song, he clapped enthusiastically.

"Very fine voice, Miss Delaney, very fine."

Philip added his applause, but he exclaimed loudly, "What did she do? What's she done?"

His sister glared at him with an intensity of anger that would have withered a tree. "Please be quiet, Brother. Where are your manners?"

Mrs. Delaney looked embarrassed at her daughter's outburst and fanned herself vigorously, while Craig busied himself with searching out another song from the sheets on the music stand. Fortunately, the door opened and Newcombe entered the room carrying a large tray on which sat a silver tea service. Mrs. Bowling was behind him with a two-tiered cake dish. Murdoch was relieved to see that she had changed her apron and was wearing one that was relatively crisp and white. She had even added a maid's starched cap.

"You can put the tray on the sideboard, if you please," said Mrs. Delaney.

The innkeeper did so, swinging the tray with ease. Mrs. Delaney stood up and went over to the sideboard. Philip got there before her.

"Ooh, tasties," he said, and reached for one of the small cakes that were on the dish.

"Now, Mr. Philip, wait until your guests have had theirs," said Mrs. Bowling.

"I'm hungry," he said, and snatched a cake from the dish. Mrs. Bowling's reaction was fast. She slapped his hand so hard, he dropped the cake.

"Ow, ow. Momma, she hurt me."

Mrs. Delaney looked frightened. "Philip, please be a good boy and sit down ..."

He raised his fist and Murdoch leaped out of his seat, certain Philip was going to strike his own mother. However, she jumped back and the boy pivoted toward the sideboard, grabbed the tray, and heaved it across the room. The plates and the cups and saucers flew into the air, and the heavy silver tea pot smacked into one of the lamps, sending it crashing to the floor. There was a flash as the oil caught fire.

"Momma, stop him!" Kate shrieked. Almost instantaneously, Philip, his eyes wild as a lunatic's, snatched up a butter knife from the sideboard and started towards his sister.

Murdoch, already on his feet, caught Philip by the wrist, while Newcombe leaped forward to stamp on the flames.

"None of that." He jerked the young man's arm downward, pulling him around and forcing him to drop the knife. At the same time, he managed to grab the other wrist, crossing Philip's arms behind him in a way that made it impossible for him to move. His mother stood where she was, petrified.

Suddenly Mrs. Bowling was at Murdoch's side. Philip was alternately grunting and roaring with rage and trying to kick out at him. Mrs. Bowling stepped in front of them and caught Philip by the lower lip, twisting it in a way that horse dealers twitch a horse they want to subdue. He quieted down at once.

"You can let him go," Mrs. Bowling said to Murdoch.

"I can't do that, ma'am, unless I have his guarantee he won't cause trouble."

"He won't."

Reluctantly, Murdoch let go of Philip's wrists. The boy made no attempt to remove the woman's hold on him but stood still, whimpering a little.

"I'm going to let you go, but you must be a good boy."

She released his lip.

Philip pointed at the mess on the floor, "Oo, what happened?" Newcombe had extinguished the fire, but there was a black sooty mark on the carpet and pieces of glass and china scattered around it.

"We had an accident," said Mrs. Bowling. "Come on, we'll fetch a mop and a broom and you can help me clean up."

She directed Philip out of the room, and without another word Mrs. Delaney followed them.

Kate Delaney watched them go, her face tight with anger. She turned to Craig. "Let's continue, James. I have a new sheet from McQuaig's. We can learn it together."

Craig gazed at her in disbelief. "Kate ... what happened just now? I mean ..." His voice trailed off.

She didn't answer but riffled through the song sheets that were on the music stand and took out a sheet. "Here it is. A piece by Mr. Gilbert and Mr. Sullivan." She thrust it onto the music stand.

"I don't think I can play anymore," said Craig.

Kate stared at the carpet. She appeared to be on the brink of tears but clenched her jaw and didn't let go. "We mustn't let him spoil everything. He always does. Never mind, though. I'll fetch some more tea."

She had to step over the blackened swatch of carpet as she left the room. Newcombe and Murdoch might as well have been invisible.

The three men were left in the ensuing silence like small boats bobbing in the wake of a steamer. Craig took a silk handkerchief from his waistcoat pocket and wiped his face.

"Whew. What a show that was. Worthy of the theatre, if you ask me."

"The poor fellow's batchy," said Newcombe. He tapped his own head. "Can't help himself."

"You acted with great presence of mind, if I may say so, Mr. Williams," said Craig, "grabbing him like that. One might almost think you were a professional at it."

There was a tap at the door, and Mrs. Bowling entered. She was carrying a broom and a pail.

"Master Philip is having a lie down."

Craig got to his feet. "I'll say good afternoon to you, gentlemen. I've lost my stomach for singing for today."

"Such a pity and such a sweet song." Murdoch couldn't resist. "The ladies do so want us to make promises to them, don't they?"

James Craig frowned. "I suppose they do."

He left.

Newcombe was helping Mrs. Bowling pile up some of the cakes onto the dish, which was unbroken. She was making clicking noises of disapproval.

"One of these days, he's going to set the house on fire, you mark my words."

Murdoch took the coal shovel from the fireplace and held it, while Newcombe swept up the glass and bits of china onto it and dumped them into the pail.

"This is going to need to be scrubbed," said Mrs. Bowling. "New carpet, too. Just bought it last month."

Murdoch realised all of the furnishings looked pristine.

"New furniture too, I see."

Mrs. Bowling frowned. "Sinful waste of money, if you ask me. The other stuff was quite good enough; but no, soon as the insurance money came in, Missus has to have everything new. But only in here, you might notice. Not where it's really needed."

"I don't know how they'd manage without you, Mrs. Bowling," said Newcombe. "You handled the lad like a lion tamer in a circus."

She cast a rather triumphant glance at Murdoch. "He's just a babe in a man's flesh. His mother's afraid of him, more's the pity, and indulges him far too much in my opinion."

Murdoch did not feel anywhere as admiring as his companion. The whole scene had brought to mind an incident that had happened some years ago when he was working at a logging camp near Huntsville. A travelling circus came to the camp one evening to entertain the loggers. One of the performers was a dwarf, who barely reached the knees of the big men around him. Near the end of the evening meal, he came into the hut with a huge brown, scruffy bear in tow. The bear lay down quietly beside him, while the dwarf sipped on a tankard of beer. One or two of the men, on the lookout for some excitement, began to yell out taunts. "What's wrong with your doggy, little man? The cat would scare him half to death by the look of him."

At first the dwarf ignored them but that only incited them to cruder remarks. "Shagged him to death have you?"

One of the loggers, more stupid and more drunk than the others, got up and swaggered over.

"Hey puss," he said and reached out his hand. Suddenly, the bear reared on its hind legs and roared, showing ferocious yellow teeth. He was almost the same height as the logger and he swiped out with his massive paw. The man came within inches of losing the side of his face. He yelled out in fear and fell backward, scrambling to get out of the way.

Calmly, the dwarf got to his feet, looked up at the animal and snapped his fingers. With a growl, the bear dropped back to the floor. Another snap of the fingers and he rolled over on his side like a huge dog and buried his massive head in his paws. The dwarf sat astride his neck. The logger was discovered to have shat in his britches, which was the joke of the camp for weeks afterward. All the men were vastly impressed by the dwarf's display of control over such

a savage creature and he was showered with money. Murdoch was impressed for a different reason. He happened to be sitting close by and he had seen the dwarf touch the bear with his foot moments before the logger had approached. Stuck in the toe of his boot was a long needle.

Mrs. Bowling had provided them with a show. The disconcerting thing was that Murdoch didn't know who this display was intended for.

Chapter Twenty-three

SOMEWHAT RELUCTANTLY , NEWCOMBE left the puppy in the care of Mrs. Bowling, with instructions for feeding and care. None of the Delaney family reappeared. Kate must have seen James Craig leave, and she did not make good her promise of fresh tea. Newcombe and Murdoch headed back to the tavern.

"I didn't expect anything like that to happen," said Newcombe. "The lad's been very well behaved when he's been down at the inn."

"Surely it's not the first time he's exploded in that way. Mrs. Bowling obviously knew what to do."

"She certainly did."

"I thought for a minute he was going to attack his mother."

"I doubt it would go that far but you yourself were swift off the mark, Will."

They walked on, the innkeeper unusually quiet. Finally Murdoch said, "I see what you mean about Miss Kate. She has completely lost her heart to young Craig."

"Let's hope that's all she's lost. According to Mrs. Bowling, they are left alone for hours at a time. Practising they claim; but if I had a girl that age, I'd want to know exactly what they was practising at, wouldn't you?"

"Mrs. Bowling confides in you, does she?"

Newcombe stopped abruptly and faced Murdoch. The wind had reddened the tip of his nose, and his cheeks and his eyes were watery. "What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing in particular. It's just that you seem to be privy to the Delaneys' private life, and I assumed that was because their servant likes to gossip."

The innkeeper stared at Murdoch, trying to determine if he was telling the truth. He relaxed a little. "Look, Will, you seem a good sort to me. I know you've got a job to do and that means you've got to ask questions, but you're sailing a bit close to the dock. Mrs. Bowling is a decent Christian woman. She's alone and she gets lonesome. She doesn't feel comfortable coming into the tavern, as is understandable, so I take her a jug on occasion. We're friends, you might say. She chatters on like all women do. I don't pay her no mind."

Murdoch nodded sympathetically. He had touched a nerve here, but he didn't know why, and at this stage he certainly didn't want to jeopardise the good feeling that had so far existed between the two of them.

At the bridge Newcombe stopped. "I need to make water."

He turned his back on Murdoch, walked over to a tree, and urinated against the trunk. When he was done, he came back, buttoning his trousers. "That's better. Nothing like a piss when you've got to do it. Do you have to go?"

"No, I'm all right, thanks," said Murdoch, although he did wonder for a moment if he shouldn't try and mark the tree to reassure his host.

He took out his watch and checked the time.

"Have you got an appointment, Will? You're forever looking at your piece, there."

"Am I? I wasn't aware of that."

In part he was timing the distance back to the bridge and from there to the tavern, but the pressure of time never left him, sitting like an ugly bird on his right shoulder ready to peck his eyes out.

You're all I've got, Will. Don't turn your back on me .

It wasn't *he* who had the appointment.

As they were approaching the top of the hill, Newcombe asked, "Are you married by chance, Will?"

"No, I've not yet had the pleasure."

"Ah. Pleasure yes." Newcombe tapped the side of his nose. "Pain, too, if you're not careful. Wives can be fierce when they're roused."

"Is that so?"

"It is and therefore I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't repeat to Maria what I just told you about Mrs. Bowling. She's the salt of the earth is my wife, but she, er, she might make more of it than there is, if you understand what I mean."

"Of course. Not every wife would be secure with their husband visiting lonely widow ladies with jugs of beer, especially if they're kept in the dark about it."

"Exactly." Newcombe let out such a sigh, Murdoch's curiosity was whetted even more. He wondered if the innkeeper's visits to Mrs. Bowling were as innocent as he claimed. He'd felt the tension between them in the kitchen. That didn't come about because Newcombe once in a while delivered some flat brew. But he was puzzled. Mrs. Bowling was plain featured, not an obvious object of illicit desire. On the other hand, his impression of Maria Newcombe was of a kind-hearted woman who, when younger, would have been round and luscious as a plum. Did desire fade as the years went by? He'd never talked about it to Liza. Their love for each other had been hot, hers as well as his, and he couldn't imagine a time when that would have waned. Apparently for some men it did.

"All right, are we?" asked the innkeeper. Murdoch nodded. They were at the door of the tavern now. There were two mud scrapers outside, and both he and Newcombe cleaned off their boots. Murdoch's thoughts jumped to Enid Jones, also a widow, also lonely.

"If you scrape anymore, you're going to take off your sole," said Newcombe.

Murdoch walked all the way from the Manchester, not yet sure how Havoc would behave if they took the streetcar. The

little terrier seemed to hate being picked up and snarled and snapped ferociously at the slightest indication that was going to happen. According to Newcombe, the dog would get used to him, and he'd provided some gamey pieces of meat to feed him.

Havoc so far had maintained a surly distance. Contrary to what the innkeeper had said, he showed no interest in the meat, sniffing at it and even taking a nibble but spitting it out immediately. However, he did walk well on his leash, trotting quietly at Murdoch's side. By the time they reached Queen Street, Murdoch was knackered. He was tempted to postpone his call until tomorrow, but he didn't dare.

Earlier in the year, while he was investigating the mysterious death of a young girl, Murdoch had met Samuel Quinn. The girl's frozen body had been discovered in a laneway almost directly opposite to the rooming house where Quinn lived. Murdoch had liked the young man, who was a baker with a side passion for dogs. He had a feeling that the best person to consult about the "Fancy" might be him. He turned up Sumach to St. Luke's Street where Quinn lived. The houses here were tall and narrow, pressed together in tight rows of four or five dwellings. The boardinghouse was shabby, the gables peeling. Murdoch wondered if Bernadette Weston still lived here. The thought of her made him uneasy, as it always had, and he banged hard on the front door. The bellpull was broken, and there was no knocker. He thumped a second time, tried the doorknob, and found the door unlocked. He stepped into the dark hallway. There was a thin sliver of light coming from the second door; but before he had to inch his way forward in the darkness, the door opened and Quinn himself came out.

"Ahh!"

"It's all right, Sam. Detective Murdoch here."

"You almost gave me a heart seizure."

“Beg pardon. Nobody answered my knock. I’ve come to have a word with you.”

Havoc burst into a flurry of barks, which were answered by a deeper baying from behind Quinn. A sleek hound poked its nose around his legs, saw Havoc, and barked a warning.

“Quiet, Princess. Get back in there.”

The dog ignored him. Havoc was beside himself, straining at the leash to get into the fray.

Quinn grabbed Princess by her collar and hauled her into the room. In a moment he returned, carrying a candlestick this time. “Come in. I was just having my tea.”

“What shall I do about the dog?”

Havoc was still yapping fiercely.

“I’ve put Princess in her box so you can bring him in.”

Perversely, Havoc dragged on the leash and didn’t want to move. Murdoch decided to risk it, grabbed up the dog, and carried him into the room. Princess was stowed in a homemade crate by the bed. She didn’t bark at the reappearance of the terrier, just sat watching calmly. Either reassured or intimidated by the strange surroundings, Havoc stopped barking, and Murdoch put him on the floor. Just as he remembered from before, the room was uncomfortably hot, the coal fire blazing in the hearth.

Quinn stretched out his hand. “Good to see you again, Mr. Murdoch.”

They shook hands. Quinn pulled forward a wooden box. “Have a seat.” He glanced around the room. “Sorry, I seem to have misplaced the cushion.”

“That’s all right.” Murdoch sat down. Quinn indicated the teapot, which was on a small japanned table beside the bed.

“Can I pour you some tea?”

“I’d like that.”

Murdoch undid his coat and took off his hat and placed it on the floor beside the box. The tiny room didn’t seem to have known fresh air for years. He tried to breathe shallowly. His host was dressed only in his trousers and a

red flannel undershirt, but even his face was shiny with sweat.

Quinn went to the bed, reached down and pulled out a cardboard box that had once contained gloves, took out a mug, and put it on the table. He poured the strong black tea and handed the mug to Murdoch.

“Finish your dinner, please,” said Murdoch.

There was a plate with the remains of what looked like a pork pie.

“I’m done. Here, I’ll give your dog some. What’s his name?”

“Havoc.”

“How long have you had him?”

“I only just inherited him.”

Quinn clicked his tongue at the terrier and placed a piece of the pie on the floor in front of him. Havoc sniffed, took a bite, then gagged and spat out the food.

“Doesn’t like it,” said Quinn. He picked up the meat and took it over to Princess, who poked her nose out between the slats of the box and gulped down the morsel.

Quinn grinned at Murdoch. “She’s like a bog; she’ll swallow anything.”

Murdoch sipped at the tea while Quinn perched on the bed and watched him. He looked nervous, and Murdoch hoped he had a clean conscience. He decided to put him out of his misery.

“I’m investigating another case, and it involves the Fancy. I thought you’d be a good man to talk to as you know dogs so well.”

Quinn tugged at his thick moustache. “What do you want to know?”

“There was a ratting match back in the summer at the Manchester tavern up on Shaftesbury Avenue above St. Clair. Later, a man was found murdered in the ravine, presumably because of a quarrel over the win. Have you heard anything about it?”

Quinn shook his head. "Can't say I have. I'm not connected with that crowd anymore." He made a gesture with his hand. "Straight and narrow all the way, that's me. I got a better job at the Rossin."

Murdoch gave an appreciative whistle. "Swell place."

"It is. Royalty has stayed there so they tell me. I do all the cakes and tarts, just like I used to. It's more work 'cos they can put up over four hundred guests at a time. But then they're giving me more wages, so I'm not complaining. Come by any morning and I'll slip you a sample."

Murdoch drank some more of the tea. He believed Quinn when he said he hadn't heard of the Delaney case, which seemed to have passed strangely unnoticed in a city that liked its lurid details when there was a murder involved. Perhaps justice had been too swift for the newspapers to get interested.

His host picked up the teapot. "Fill up?"

"No, thanks. That's plenty for me." Murdoch could feel the tannic acid eating holes in his stomach. "What I actually wanted, Sam, was in the way of a favour. I'd like to check into all the wags who were at the match. Find out anything I can."

"Verdict in doubt, is it?"

"No, not that. The accused seems guilty all right, but I'm just tying up loose ends. There was a man at the match who didn't come forward at the trial, and I'd like to find him in particular." He used the same half-truth he had given Newcombe. "I'm working for the man's family. We want to make absolutely sure."

"Is your fellow going to hang?"

"Yes."

"Soon?"

"Yes."

"We'd better get a move on then. What's the cove's name who you want to find?"

"He went by White, but that probably isn't his real name. He's from the city, bit of a toff. Might be in banking or the legal profession. He was cagey about himself, not surprisingly."

"How'd he do at the match?"

"Didn't win or lose. Ended up fairly even. The major winner was the man who was killed, Delaney. He soaked them all. Walked away with ninety-four dollars."

It was Sam's turn to whistle. "Not too bad, that."

"One of the other players was the man now sentenced. He accused Delaney of cheating by blowing a whistle to distract his dog at a crucial moment. They had a big barney, and Delaney was found later that night in the creek with his head knocked in."

"Did your man confess?"

"No, he claims he's innocent."

Quinn poured himself some more tea and added a splash of milk and two spoonfuls of sugar.

"What's his name, this cove?"

"Do you need to know that?"

"It'll be easier if I know what I'm talking about." Sam was eyeing him curiously.

"His name is Henry Murdoch. Usually gets called Harry."

"Murdoch? Are you related then?" "He's my father."

Embarrassed, Quinn got off the bed and made a pretense of checking on the condition of the fire. He added a lump of coal to the blaze before he spoke again.

"Must be hard, that."

Murdoch shrugged. "Let's say, it's a most peculiar position to be in."

Sam straightened up and turned to face him. "I'll do what I can. Give me the names of the men and dogs."

"White ran a brown-and-white Parson Jack feist named Samson, bandy legged; Pugh had a bulldog by the name of Gargoyle; Charles Craig and his son, James, both had pugs, Tiny and Bess. The innkeeper also put in his own dog, a

Manchester terrier called Tripper. The dead man was the big winner, as I said, with another Manchester, Flash."

"Plucky little dogs them."

"When do you think you'd have something for me?"

"I'll start on it right this instant. There's a fellow I know down near the wharf. I'll go and have a word with him. If he don't know, nobody will."

Murdoch stood up. "I appreciate this, Sam."

Quinn dipped his head shyly. He pointed at Havoc. "This was your father's dog, I assume."

"Yes. I don't know what to do with him. He's a mean sod."

Suddenly, Sam crouched down and grabbed Havoc with one hand by the scruff of his neck. "It's all right, little fellow. I won't hurt you." Quickly he pried open the terrier's mouth. "Ha, I thought so. Look here. He's got a nasty abscess on the inside of his lip."

Murdoch peered over and saw an angry-looking pustule where Quinn was pointing.

"He got that from a rat. They give dirty bites. That's why he won't eat. Probably why he won't let you touch him. Here, hold him a minute."

Quinn took his mug and tossed the dregs of his tea into the fire. Then he scrambled underneath his bed, which seemed to act as his cupboard, and pulled out a brown bottle.

"Simple carbolic acid. Good for almost anything that ails you, man or dog."

He splashed some of the liquid into the mug and added water from the kettle on the hob.

"Now, Mr. Havoc, this is going to make you better, you poor mite you. Hold his head firm now."

Murdoch did so and again Quinn lifted the little dog's lip. He dipped his finger into the carbolic solution and dabbed it on the abscess. "If you can do that twice a day, he should be right as rain in a week."

Quinn sat back and they regarded the terrier as he promptly rubbed his muzzle with his paw to rid himself of the substance. Quinn went to stop him, and Havoc snapped. Sam jerked his hand away, missing the bite by an inch.

"Hey, stop that!" Murdoch said angrily to the dog.

"No sense in dinning him. That gum must hurt like hell. If he'd wanted to take a piece out of me, he would have. That was a warning. Just make sure you've got a good grip on him when you put the carbolic on, that's all. He'll be sweet tempered as a lamb before you know it."

Murdoch frowned.

"Tell you what," said Quinn. "How'd you like me to hold on to him and treat him myself? You can pick him up tomorrow."

"That would be a big relief. Thank you."

He shook hands.

"I'll show you out," said Quinn. He picked up the candlestick and opened the door.

"Does Ettie still live here?" Murdoch asked.

"She does. But she moved upstairs." He grinned. "She's got a new job, too. She works at Mr. Eaton's store in the sewing department. Very respectable. She doesn't do any of that old stuff."

He meant selling her sexual favours, which was how Ettie had earned most of her money when Murdoch had last known her.

"I'm happy to hear that, too. Give her my regards."

"I will. She'll be pleased to know you were by."

Murdoch nodded in the direction of the hound, who had watched all the proceedings with bright, curious eyes. "Evening, Miss Princess. Evening, Havoc."

He followed Quinn down the hall and out into the welcome cool air.

Chapter Twenty-four

ON CERTAIN OCCASIONS ALGERNON BLACKSTOCK JR. thought it prudent to use a name other than his real one. He'd called himself Green, Redman, and more recently White. His own family name was too well known in the city, and the last thing he wanted was for his father to get wind of his little "flutters," as he called them. Supposedly women were the ones who cared about their standing in society, but in the Blackstock household it was Algernon Sr., Q.C., to whom it mattered.

At the moment, Blackstock Senior was in his element. He was defence counsel in a well-publicised case, which he was sure to win, and he had a large audience ready to admire him. Actually, Algie felt sorry for the plaintiff, a small woman almost lost from sight in the witness box. His father was about to conduct his cross-examination. Blackstock Senior was not a tall man, but he made up for his lack of height by his commanding presence, a presence carefully cultivated. His iron grey hair and beard were neatly trimmed; his black suit and starched white collar and tabs startlingly white. He was vain about his appearance, and a barber visited him in his chambers once a week. Blackstock never lost a case. This was partly due to the fact that he only took on cases that were certainties and partly because he had a way with juries. He was able to address the men in a manner they understood and respected, even though his tone and demeanour were patrician and bespoke privilege and money. His denigration of opposing witnesses was so subtle that he never elicited sympathy on their behalf but left them lacerated with his wit and smarting from a mockery they barely understood and could not combat. Other lawyers

feared him and communicated this to their witnesses so that they usually presented themselves incoherently or with belligerence. Neither attitude went over well with a jury.

To Algie's surprise, however, the plaintiff was holding her own. Perhaps because she was such an unsophisticated woman, her bewilderment was influencing the men of the jury against the defendant. He could see it. His father was aware of it too, and he began to pace in front of the witness box, a sure sign he was searching for an opening, a vulnerable spot on which to pounce.

"Mrs. Willfong, am I to understand then, that you, a married woman for more than three years, were not aware that the good doctor, the defendant, was having connections with you?"

"No, sir. I was tilted backwards in the examining chair so I could not see."

The courthouse was packed with spectators, mostly men, who listened with prurient attention as Mrs. Willfong whispered her testimony. The smell of winter clothes, permeated with stale tobacco smoke, was thick in the air. It was an odour Algie hated, just as he hated being a lawyer.

Judge Falconbridge scowled at the witness. "I beg you once again, madam, to please speak up. I realise this subject is most embarrassing, but it is you who have brought charges and therefore we must ensure the accused has a fair trial."

"Thank you, Your Honour," said Blackstock Senior. "I have myself no wish to press Mrs. Willfong, but this is a very serious matter before us, and my client is only too anxious to clear his good name."

He indicated Dr. Atkins, who was sitting stony faced in the prisoner's box. Blackstock had asked him to cut his usually bushy side-whiskers and trim his hair so that he was now the epitome of respectability. Mrs. Willfong, although in her best brown silk, looked plain, rather shabby. She was still a young woman, but she had no bloom of beauty to sway the

hearts of the jurymen. Algie would have considered the case a foregone conclusion if it wasn't for the clear soft voice and her air of utter sincerity. His father was going to have a difficult time discrediting her.

"Madam, as I understand from your statement, you were consulting Dr. Atkins because you wished to conceive a child and so far you were barren. Is that so?"

"Yes, sir."

The expression of pain on her face was unmistakable.

"Given this situation, it is only natural and professional for a doctor to have to conduct an intimate examination. Would you agree?"

"Yes, sir, but this was not a normal examination."

"Please answer only the questions I ask, Mrs. Willfong. It is for the jury to determine that. Try to refrain from slipping in statements that are prejudicial."

"Objection, Your Honour."

Mrs. Willfong's lawyer was a large, greasy-haired man, who looked and smelled as if he could do with a bath. Blackstock had been pleased when he saw who was representing her. "Larkins' very presence will almost take our case for us, Algie," he'd said.

Judge Falconbridge shook his head. "Objection overruled."

Blackstock continued, his voice a little more stern. "Mrs. Willfong, in accordance with normal procedure, Dr. Atkins introduced a medical instrument into your, er, vagina with the purpose of determining whether or not there was a blockage. Can you say whether this instrument was stationary or not?"

"It moved backwards and forwards."

The lawyer clasped his fingers together and briefly raised his eyes to the ceiling as if in prayer.

"This next question, madam, is one of great delicacy. I do appreciate that most of the fairer sex would find it shameful to have to answer. However, it is a necessary and vital question, and I must remind you, madam, that you are

under oath. You have sworn before your Maker that you will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

Algie expected that Larkins would object at any minute, but he didn't. He just sat picking at the sheaf of papers in front of him as if he had lost one of them. Mrs. Willfong braced herself. She looked over at her husband, a man also in his best clothes but with the weathered skin of a labourer. Blackstock saw the pleading look and shifted so that his body obstructed her view.

"Madam, when you felt this medical instrument inside you, moving backwards and forwards, were your passions excited?"

Unable to see her husband, she looked at Judge Falconbridge for help. There was none forthcoming.

"Answer the question, madam."

"You do understand my meaning, don't you, Mrs. Willfong?" asked Blackstock. "I am referring to the sensations that *some* women experience during connection."

He placed a slight emphasis on the "some."

The courtroom was utterly quiet, and Algie shifted uneasily in his chair. He had to admit the old man was good. He was only thankful it wasn't him in the box. Mrs. Willfong was on the verge of tears.

"What is your answer, madam? Under oath, would you say that during these examinations, which were repeated several times over the weeks, you became excited?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"You invariably spent?"

"Yes."

"Was this excitation something that you share with your husband during normal and legal marital connections?"

"No, I er ..."

This time Blackstock moved so that she could see her husband. Algie had never seen such abject shame on a man's face.

"Let me make this clear then, Mrs. Willfong. You returned time and again to Dr. Atkins while he treated you, as he should have, for your problem. After a three-month period, he said he could do no more and discharged you as his patient. You then turned around and brought a suit against him for medical malpractice, claiming he had forced connections on you all those several times without your being aware of it."

"That's right.... I didn't know what he was doing."

"Didn't you, Mrs. Willfong? How strange. I suppose you returned to his office again and again, like a female detective, in the attempt *to* determine exactly what he was doing."

"No, that is not true. He lay on top of me, over the chair; he was using an instrument ..."

She was weeping uncontrollably now, her shaky composure gone. Algie studied the jury as he was supposed to do. There were thirteen men, and most of them were now regarding the woman with a mixture of contempt and pity. He knew that the most telling comment that his father had slipped in was the one about the husband. Never had her passions been excited by him, but she admitted to being spent several times with the doctor. What did it matter if he had used an instrument or his own tool, which was more likely. The case was won.

Judge Falconbridge was banging with his gavel.

"The court will be adjourned for one hour. Men of the jury, you will remain in your quarters until called for. Mrs. Willfong, you may step down. Mr. Larkins, will you kindly see to your client."

He stood up, gathered his robe about him, and left the room. Reluctantly, Larkins helped the sobbing Mrs. Willfong out of the witness box. Her husband shoved through the row of people on the bench, but turned on his heel at the aisle and left the courtroom. Blackstock beckoned to his son, and they left by the lawyer's door to the private chambers

reserved for them at the back. Dr. Atkins looked pleased, but Algie didn't meet his eye.

Blackstock threw his arm around Algie's shoulders. "We've won, wouldn't you say?"

"Let's not count our chickens just yet, Father. You can never tell with juries."

"Pessimist. They're in the palm of my hand. They all see her as a randy tart."

"She's not though, is she? Seems a good sort to me."

"Never underestimate the appetite of a woman once it's awakened, my good fellow. Believe me, I know."

He didn't elaborate, and at the door of the chamber he went into the senior counsel's room. Algie went into the room for junior counsel and walked straight over to the cupboard where the lawyers kept their special bags. Quickly he fished in the bottom of his and took out a silver flask. Every day Algie filled this flask with Peruvian wine of Coco. This was supposed to be a tonic for those suffering with consumption or other blood diseases, but he found a good cap or two gave him a surge of energy and such a lift of his spirits he couldn't do without it. He took a quick gulp, then a second. His initials were engraved on the side of the flask with an inscription: FROM YOUR DEVOTED WIFE, EMMELINE . If she had ever had her passions excited during lovemaking, he was not aware of it.

"Damnation." He had dribbled some of the liquid down his white tabs. He pulled out his handkerchief and dabbed at the stain but only seemed to make matters worse. There was a tap at the door.

"Just a minute."

Hurriedly he put the flask back into the bag and took out a vial of essence of peppermint. He shook a couple of drops on his tongue, then called, "Enter!"

His clerk, Lavery, came in.

"There's somebody who wants to talk to you, Mr. Blackstock."

"Not now, I'm in the middle of a case."

"I told him that of course, sir, but he won't take no for an answer. He says he's an old chum of yours from previous days."

The clerk's eyes were bright with curiosity.

Algie scowled. "Did this old chum have his card perchance?"

"As a matter of fact, he didn't. Said he'd just run out. But he said to give you this riddle."

"What riddle? What kind of nonsense are you talking?"

"I beg your pardon, sir, I was getting to it. I am just reporting what was said to me. He is something of a joker, this fellow. 'Just for a lark,' he said. 'I've got no card,' says he, 'but Mr. Algie Blackstock likes a joke, I know he does, so let him guess who I am. The riddle is as follows. My first is the opposite of woman, my second is the reverse of the back, my whole is a dog of a town.' Shall I repeat it, sir."

"No, I heard you the first time. I don't know if I like silly jokes like that, Lavery. What kind of fellow is he?"

"Clean enough; speaks well. He's sober, but he's a touch on the flashy side." Lavery paused, savouring the moment in his otherwise dull day. "If I may be so bold, sir, I do think I have solved his riddle. The opposite of woman is man; the reverse of back is front or the chest. My whole is a dog of a town." He paused to see the effect his words were having. "That is to say, Manchester. There are terriers so named, and of course there is the English town, city and dog. My brother-in-law owned one years ago. Ergo, the man's name is Manchester."

Algie stared at him. "What does he look like, this cove?"

"Medium height. Maybe thirty years or so. He's got a streak of white hair in front like a horse's blaze."

Algie laughed, but even in his own ears it sounded false.

"Ah yes, now I remember. He's just an old school pal playing some joke on me."

"Shall I show him in then?"

"Yes, yes. Of course."

"Will you be wanting some tea or coffee served?"

"No. I'll ring if I need you."

"Yes, sir."

Lavery withdrew and Algie stood up and went to the window. He leaned his forehead against the pane, and the glass felt wonderfully cool to his skin. This room was always too hot, the fire blazing in the hearth as if it was a lord's banquet.

"Damnation. Blast and damnation."

The door opened and Lavery ushered in the visitor, who went immediately to where Algie was standing.

"Hello, old chum. Good to see you again. I've had a merry dance to find you."

The clerk closed the door, and Algie turned around. He ignored the proffered hand.

"What the hell do you want?"

The man who had called himself Manchester shrugged.

"Not very much, old chum. Just a little chat really, a chin wag between friends. Why don't we sit down and make ourselves comfortable."

Algie remained where he was. "I have to be back in court shortly. Spit it out. What do you want?"

"You're looking at me like a man with a guilty conscience, Mr. White. Oh, I beg your pardon, that is your nom de plume, isn't it? I forgot."

"There's no law against using a different name as long as you're not signing any contracts or pretending to be somebody else."

"Ah, yes. And I'm certain you are most familiar with the law. You must have had to rationalise to yourself disappearing like that. You do know John Delaney was murdered, don't you?"

Algie was chewing on his moustache. "I read about it. It was such an open-and-shut case I felt nothing useful would be gained by my coming forward."

"Quite so. And people are so quick to cast judgement, aren't they? They would see harm in a lawyer gentleman like yourself participating in an illegal gambling match, wouldn't they? Live and let live is my motto."

"I tell you, nothing I had to say would have been useful."

"No, I suppose not. The Craigs said the three of you left together, and you went on your way along Summerhill Avenue. You couldn't be guilty of the crime of murder, could you?"

"Why are you dinning me like this? Who the hell are you?"

"The name's Pugh, Patrick Pugh, and it is my name of baptism. However, if you'd be so good as to take a seat, I would appreciate it. I become nervous when a strapping gentleman like yourself starts to turn red and is standing over me, snorting."

Reluctantly, Algie perched on the chair behind the desk. "I told you I have to go back to court shortly."

"I see that your father is senior counsel. A fine upstanding man. Values his reputation and that of his family, I am sure."

Algie pulled open a drawer and took out a banker's chit. "So that's it. You want to be paid off, do you? Money for silence."

Pugh frowned in mock offence. "Not at all, Mr. White. Forgive me for distressing you with my comments. You obviously have reached an erroneous conclusion that I am a blackmailer. Rather the reverse. I am coming to you for help. I am the one prepared to pay."

Chapter Twenty-five

USUALLY MURDOCH WAS HAPPY TO COME HOME. In the winter Mrs. Kitchen, his landlady, always made sure a lamp was burning in the front parlour; and no matter what the hour, she would have his dinner ready for him. Not that it was always a delight to eat what she had prepared. Beatrice was an energetic and inventive woman when it came to caring for those she loved, but the art of cooking had somehow eluded her. Even if Murdoch was on time, he was often presented with dried, overcooked meat and soggy potatoes and vegetables. He didn't really mind. The friendship and mutual respect that had developed between him and the Kitchens more than compensated for unappetising meals.

Tonight, as he approached the house, however, he felt utterly glum. His mood wasn't helped by the conspicuous darkness of the second-floor room. Perhaps because of his talk with Newcombe about ardent young women, he was thinking about Mrs. Enid Jones. Since she'd abruptly packed her belongings and moved to another lodging, he'd made no attempt to get in touch with her.

"I don't want us to mistake proximity for true affection, Will," was what she'd said.

Albeit reluctantly, he had to admit there was truth in that, but he was still smarting.

Mrs. Kitchen came to meet him as soon as he entered the house. "Mr. Murdoch, I was starting to worry. I expected you would be gone for one or two hours at the most."

"So did I, Mrs. K."

She stood by while he divested himself of his coat and hat.

"I can see the young man proved very difficult."

For a moment he didn't know what she was referring to. It seemed a lifetime ago that he had set out for the jail, thinking he was going to have a heart-to-heart talk with a pickpocket.

"Adam Blake wasn't the reason for my summons. I'd like to sit down with both you and Arthur and tell you what has happened."

"I put up a cold meat plate for you. Will you have that first?"

"I'm not hungry, thank you. Just a cup of tea would be excellent. Weak, if you don't mind."

"Go and see Arthur and I'll bring it." She was about to go to the kitchen when she paused. "You clearly have unhappy news, so perhaps I can tell you something to cheer you up."

He smiled. "I would certainly like that."

"Mrs. Jones dropped by earlier this afternoon. I took the liberty of telling her about your sister, and she asked that I express the most sincere condolences."

His heart had given a lurch, but he wasn't about to reveal too much.

"That was kind."

"I told her you were off from the station on leave. She said that if you were not engaged tonight, she is at home and would be most pleased to see you."

"Is that so?"

Mrs. Kitchen patted his arm. "She is a good woman, most sincere. A visit might lift your spirits."

And what then? thought Murdoch. Was there any point in contemplating a courtship that couldn't be consummated.

"It's getting late, I -"

"She asked me particularly to tell you that she hoped you wouldn't mind a later hour. Half past eight would be convenient."

Murdoch thought that a less respectable woman would have winked. "Mrs. K., why do I get the feeling I'm being

pushed out like a fledgling bird?"

She looked flustered. "Of course not. It's just that she seemed particularly anxious to see you."

"All right. I will call on her."

"Good. Please go in. Arthur was worried, too."

She went off to the kitchen. Murdoch took a moment to change from boots to slippers. She was right. In spite of everything, the news that Enid wanted to see him had lifted his spirits.

For a long time now Murdoch had got into the way of sharing the vicissitudes of his daily life with both Beatrice and Arthur Kitchen. It meant a lot to Arthur, who was housebound with his illness, to discuss cases Murdoch was dealing with. If he was well enough, their conversations often became far ranging, from the current political situation, dismal, to the finer points of Catholic theology, even more dismal. The latter point of view was never expressed in front of his wife. Murdoch waited until tea had been poured and sipped; Arthur's final egg-and-cream tonic swallowed; the fire poked and set to a blaze. He felt he should have done a drum roll first. *And the big news of the day is ... I met my long-lost father today, and what a surprise: he is convicted of murder .*

He told them in as matter-of-fact a way as possible. After the inevitable exclamations, he settled down to tell everything that had transpired and what he knew about the case.

"So what do you think about all that? Any immediate opinions?"

Arthur eyed him ruefully. "Very difficult, isn't it? As you say, if not him, then who?"

"It couldn't be your father," added Beatrice, "not a murderer."

Murdoch reached over and patted her hand. He was touched by her irrational loyalty. He knew that what she meant was nobody with Murdoch blood in their veins could be a criminal.

"It would be reassuring if Mr. Quinn tracked down the mysterious Mr. White. You don't want any loopholes to fret over."

"Exactly. First thing tomorrow I'm going to visit the doctor who performed the post mortem examination. His report was very thorough, but I'd like to talk to him face to face. And after that ..." His voice trailed off. After that he had no more options that he could see. Neither of the Kitchens had asked him directly if he considered his father to be guilty, and he was grateful for their tact. When he had left the jail, so stirred by this unexpected reunion, he had entertained the possibility that Harry was innocent. However, as the day went on and he had talked to the people who had been involved, he was reverting to his first opinion: Harry had killed a man in a fit of rage and conveniently didn't remember doing so. Justice would be served.

He thought of all the times he had fantasised about justice in connection with Harry. Often, he himself administered it; sometimes God did. The end was the same. Harry suffered for his sins. The knowledge that he might very well receive the ultimate punishment was not nearly as satisfying as he had thought it would be. In fact, it brought but little pleasure.

Chapter Twenty-six

WITH A GROAN SHE COULD NOT SUPPRESS , Mother St. Raphael got up from her knees. Her breath was a white smoke in the air, and she was so stiff she stood swaying for a moment as she gained her balance. Dr. Corneille had stated categorically that more warmth in her cell would alleviate the pain from her arthritis, but she refused to ask for it. Each nun had an allotment of coal and wood for her fireplace, and she was expected to only make use of it when the weather was bitter. The prioress deeply believed she must be an example to those whose spiritual life she directed. A few of the weaker sisters, in their secret hearts, wished that she might, on occasion, be less rigorous.

Mother St. Raphael had been praying for a long time, but the Lord's will was not yet clear to her. She knew that it was her own pride that was holding her back. She took great care when she selected the nuns who came as postulants. No matter what the professed ardour, she accepted only those young women whom she felt could withstand the hardship and purity of their rule. Never again to see the outside world, to live a life of prayer to which the needs of the body were subjugated, often at great cost. Only a few women were truly suitable. Sister Philomena had entered the order when she was very young. In spite of herself and the rule that forbade special friendships, Sister St. Raphael, as she was then, had become very fond of the new postulant. She saw her own struggle for perfection mirrored in the girl, and she understood the perpetual self-recrimination when that impossible struggle failed time and again.

Sister Philomena flagellated her body and her spirit but was rarely at peace with her own conscience. The prioress more than once had been forced to admonish her, albeit gently, for her scrupulosity. However, the young nun was generous with the older sisters, who became so demanding as their bodies succumbed to age and discomfort. She never complained at the most menial chores. In spite of these manifestations of her goodness, she only seemed to taste happiness when she had occasion to amuse the other sisters during the recreation hour. In the summer, like several of the other diligent nuns, she used the hour before the Grand Silence to tend to the garden they depended on. But it was throughout the dark winter months when little work could be done that Sister Philomena entertained them all with stories of the sea that she claimed to have heard in her native province of Nova Scotia. She was a compelling storyteller and spun out the tales, doling out one episode at a time, leaving them all in suspense until the following day. Nobody ever questioned the veracity of these tales even though her store seemed endless. Occasionally, the prioress worried about the decidedly secular nature of the yarns, but she couldn't bear to deprive the little community of this small pleasure or quench the brightness in Sister Philomena's face as she addressed her rapt audience.

Mother St. Raphael walked over to her desk. She was not at all a worldly woman. She had entered the order when she was eighteen, the shy, youngest daughter of a genteel Montreal family. Her mother's piety was constantly besieged by the need for her daughters to marry well. The postulants whispered among themselves that Mother had become a nun when her heart was broken by the death of her fiancée. She was aware of this rumour but did nothing to dispel it. The truth was not nearly as romantic. Her mother had put great pressure on her to marry the son of a wealthy banker. She had loathed the sickly young man on sight and was certain his antipathy was the equal of hers. He had died

suddenly from a lung haemorrhage, and Hermione had fled to the convent where she might be safe from the admonishments of her mother and older sisters.

She had been elected prioress six years ago, and under her direction life was orderly and placid. Nothing like this had ever fallen on her shoulders before. As prioress, Mother St. Raphael was responsible for monitoring all correspondence that came and went in the convent. Although the nuns were permitted to write their own letters, the envelopes were never sealed. It would have been against the rule of their order to maintain the privacy they had experienced in the outer world. Letters that were addressed to any one of the nuns were opened and read. This was not a burdensome task as communication with the outside world was restricted. At Christmas, letters could be exchanged with immediate family members to share in the joy of Our Lord's birth. On the anniversary of the nun's marriage to Christ her Saviour, the same families were expected to mark that special day both with a novena and a suitable letter. All the correspondence and small personal effects relinquished at the time of the first vows were kept in individual cardboard boxes in a special cupboard in the prioress's room. They were forwarded to the next of kin in the event of the nun's death.

Sister Philomena's box contained a child's diary, a small number of cards and letters, a garnet ring and matching ear bobs. Mother St. Raphael had been about to wrap everything and send them to William Murdoch when she found the letter. It was this that was causing her such distress.

On the eve of taking her final vows, Sister Philomena had written to her brother. The envelope was still sealed, indicating that the prioress at that time had not read it. Mother St. Raphael had simply followed the rule and opened the letter.

She took it up again.

Dear Will: I do not know if you will ever read this letter or if what I am about to relate will ever be made known to you. I am leaving that in the hands of Our Lord. It is His will that be done. However, if you are reading this letter, it means I have been gathered into the arms of our beloved Saviour. I ask you to accept this with joy and not sorrow.

It is so long since we met face to face that in my mind you are forever my older brother, tall and strong but not yet a grown man, with your dark hair that you could never keep smooth, your brown eyes that would gaze on me so seriously, a smile that when it was bestowed on me gladdened my sad heart. I know you did not approve of my accepting my vocation, but being a nun has brought me as much peace of mind as I am allowed by God's mercy. Perhaps I am wrong to unburden myself in this way, but I believe that the truth shall make you free, and I long for freedom.

On the day our mother died, I was witness to a quarrel between her and our father. To say quarrel is not accurate because she never argued or defended herself, as you know. He was angry about some small and insignificant thing, and he hit her. Perhaps he did not mean to hit so hard, but she was knocked backwards and struck her head on the sharp corner of the kitchen cupboard, the one by the east window. She had to sit down and said she felt dizzy, but he was impatient and would not allow it. She got up and set off for the beach to gather shellfish. As you know, she was found drowned in one of the pools among the rocks. The coroner concluded that she had slipped and struck her head. However, I am convinced she would not have fallen if it were not for the blow she had received from Father.

All of my life, dearest brother, I have lived with the shame of doing nothing. I know that you will say I was a child and therefore absolved of responsibility, but I have never believed that. Sometimes he listened to me in particular. I could appeal to his conscience. That day, unfortunately, he was particularly vile tempered. He had run out of beer, and you know all too well what that did to him. I was sitting at the table when all this occurred, and I was so afraid I did nothing. Nothing. Perhaps she would not have died if I had begged him to let her rest. But I was silent, saving my own skin. When Mr. Markham came with the news that she had been discovered on the beach, Father behaved as if he were a grieving husband. He said nothing to me, and I truly believe that he was not aware of what I had witnessed. I dared not tell you, Will, because you were already so fiery. I knew you would

challenge Father, and I feared for your safety. Dear brother, you were all we had, Bertie and I. I wrestle with my conscience every day, and perhaps by the time I pass from this life I will have cleansed the anger from my heart. I pray for this.

I don't know what you will do with the information I have imparted. I am sure it will cause you great sorrow, and I pray that you will ask the Lord to guide you. I do not know if Father is alive or dead, but I hope there will come a time when I can wholeheartedly pray for his soul. You, dearest Will, are always in my prayers. May we meet in the arms of Our Lord at the judgement day.

Susanna.

For the dozenth time in the past hour, Mother St. Raphael crossed herself and asked for guidance. What good would be served if Sister Philomena's brother were to know what had happened? It was a long time ago now. According to the extern nun, Mr. Murdoch had been angry at not being allowed to see his sister's face. These past events had nothing to do with the Order, but one could never be sure with families. She had no desire to bring shameful public attention to the convent, nor would Sister Philomena have wished that.

She replaced the letter in the box and retied the black ribbon that fastened the lid.

Chapter Twenty-seven

MURDOCH HAD WALKED PAST ENID'S boardinghouse once already. He had arrived at least twenty minutes before the appointed time and not wishing to appear overly eager had gone on by. The wind was biting and a sleety snow was falling, every good reason to go and knock on the door, but he forced himself to trudge on. As he went by the corner of Queen and Parliament Streets for a second time, he passed young Constable Burley on his beat, who gave him a puzzled greeting.

"Cold night to be out, sir."

Murdoch realised he had been walking as slowly as if he were enjoying a summer stroll in Allan Gardens. He raised his head and quickened his pace purposefully.

"Brisk, Constable. Good for the lungs!"

He inadvertently took in a gulp of air so cold he started to cough. Burley suppressed a grin, gave him a salute, and continued on his rounds. Murdoch walked back as far as Sackville Street where he turned, leaving the constable to his lonely job of checking the empty houses along the street to make sure no vagrants had broken in to shelter there. A few houses from where Enid was now boarding, Murdoch paused and fished out his watch from his inner pocket. Damnation, he was still ten minutes early. He didn't want to encounter the constable again, so he stayed where he was, stamping his feet and blowing into his gloves to warm his hands. He'd forgotten his muffler, and his nose started to drip from the cold air. Damnation again, he didn't have a handkerchief. He wiped the back of his hand across his nose and sniffed hard. To be visiting at this hour was quite

unorthodox, and in spite of himself he was touched that Enid had issued her invitation. He'd better get inside, early or not.

The house was one half of a double and looked reasonably well cared for. There was a gaslight in the small front porch, and even though the blinds were all pulled down, bright cracks of light showed around the edges.

Murdoch walked up the flight of steps to the door. There were stained-glass panels on each side, and a soft amber light came from the hall. He gave the shiny brass bellpull a good tug and peered through the glass side panel. Almost immediately he saw Enid Jones coming down the stairs, and he jumped back and started to scrape his boots on the scraper fastened to the boards of the porch. She opened the door.

"Mr. Murdoch, how wonderfully punctual you are. Please to come in out of the chill."

He took off his hat, knocked some more slush from his boots, and stepped into the hall.

"I'll take your coat from you."

He thought she was a little breathless too and was glad of the distraction of coat and hat divesting. Enid was wearing a silver grey taffeta gown that rustled as she moved. He didn't remember having seen it before. Her dark hair was fastened with tortoiseshell combs but seemed looser, less severe than the way she usually wore it.

"This is a grand house," he said, rubbing his hands together to warm them.

"So it is. I am lucky to have found such accommodations. Mrs. Barrett is a widow, and she wanted a companion more than anything." She held out her hand. "I was so sorry to hear of your sister's death, Will. It must be a great loss to you."

He shrugged. "Frankly, I felt as if she died when she was professed as a nun sixteen years ago. That was the last time I saw her, and I mourned her then."

Enid's hand was warm in his, and as he looked at her, he felt his stomach turn into something fluid. Whatever it was he communicated, she lowered her eyes quickly.

"You're quite chilled. Come and get warm. My sitting room is upstairs."

There was gaslight in the sconces, and all the way up to the landing were hung large and sober oil paintings that, as far as he could tell, were biblical in nature. Mrs. Barrett was clearly a woman of great piety. Baptist piety for certain. Enid ushered him into a room off the right of the landing. There was a cheerful fire burning in the hearth, and the lamps were turned up high. The Turkish couch and matching chairs were of rich green-and-red plush; the dark mahogany furniture gleamed. It was markedly different from the relatively simple room that she had rented from Mrs. Kitchen. He was also conscious of the fact they were alone.

She had been observing his reaction, and she smiled with pleasure. "As you can see, this is a larger room than I had before, and I have been able to add some of my own furniture. That is my table and sideboard. I brought them all the way from Wales, but when we moved into Mrs. Kitchen's house, I had to store them away."

"Very fine."

"My husband was handy. He made them."

Unconsciously she touched the surface of the sideboard as if in a caress.

"Please to sit down by the fire."

He did so while she went to the tea trolley, where a silver teapot was warming over a spirit lamp.

"As I remember you like plenty of sugar and milk." "That's right."

She poured the tea and handed him the cup and saucer. He didn't want to embarrass her by constantly commenting on the fine quality of her goods and chattels, but the china was particularly delicate. He was suddenly aware that his chequered brown wool suit was shabby and his boots thick.

He had never felt this before with Enid, and he didn't like it at all.

"Since you left us, the typewriting business must be going well," he said, trying for a lighthearted note. He didn't succeed, and Enid frowned.

"Mrs. Barrett has kindly let me have two rooms for the cost of one, and in return I sit with her on an evening and sometimes read to her."

"The sermons of Mr. Wesley, I assume?"

"Not at all. She is quite fond of novels. We are presently reading Mr. Scott's *Heart of Midlothian*."

"I'd consider that rather on the pagan side, myself." He was goading her cruelly, but he couldn't stop himself.

She went over to the trolley and put one of the cakes from the two-tiered silver stand onto his plate. "It is a rousing story, and we both enjoy it."

She handed him the Eccles cake, which meant he had to juggle cup and saucer in one hand and the plate in the other. That didn't help his mood. He put the cup and saucer on the small table beside him. On it was a framed studio photograph. Clearly a family portrait of Enid, a man who he presumed was her late husband, and her son, Alwyn, at a younger age. The man had the physique of a Welshman, short and stocky with thick, dark hair. He looked confident. Enid was leaning her head backwards against his shoulder, and the boy was standing between them. Murdoch had not seen this picture before, but then he realised he had never stepped inside Enid's room when she was living at the Kitchens'.

"How does Alwyn like his new digs?" he asked.

"Quite well indeed. Mrs. Barrett has let me use the old box room for his bedroom. He is very proud to be in a room of his own. He thinks he is quite grown up." She paused and took a sip of her tea. "I didn't tell him you might be coming by tonight. I wanted him to go to bed early because he

seems a little feverish, and he would not have gone to bed until he saw you."

"Fear or pleasure?" Murdoch asked wryly. Enid's son had been decidedly ambivalent about him.

She looked uncomfortable. "He does like you, Will, it's just that ..."

"It's just that he doesn't want to share his mother's attentions."

"He's still a boy."

Murdoch shrugged. No matter what he said, they seemed to end up in a place that was stiff and uncomfortable. "Quite so," he added lamely. "I can't say that I blame him for that."

Another silence that was broken by the sound of a piece of coal falling in the fire.

Murdoch got to his feet at once. "That fire needs building up," he said, and knelt down to open the coal scuttle that was beside the fender. He picked up the tongs and dropped a couple of chunks of coal into the red maw. "There you go. I'm restored to manliness. Are there any other tasks I can do for you, ma'am?"

She smiled back at him. "You can eat another cake. I made them myself this afternoon, and it is affronted I'd be if they were left untouched."

"Gladly."

He walked over to the trolley and helped himself to a marzipan square and a scone thick with currants.

"I understand from Mrs. Kitchen you are on compassionate leave for the week."

"Yes, and that has turned out to be quite convenient as I have another investigation."

He sat down by the fire while Enid looked at him curiously.

"I would be honoured if you would share the details with me. But if you have no desire to do so, I quite understand."

He had half decided not to say anything to her, not sure how it would reflect on him. *Oh, by the way, Mrs. Jones, not only am I a papist, my father is probably a murderer!*

However, once again, something in the kindness of her expression affected him, and he wanted to tell her the whole story.

"My long-lost father has reappeared. In fact, he is in Don Jail, where he is waiting to be hung." He raced on, glad she was controlled enough to sit and listen without exclamation while he gave her a summary of what had happened in August.

"I have agreed to do what I can," he concluded.

"What does that mean?"

"It means I am doing what I would do in any investigation. I am examining the evidence as presented. I am asking questions of the people who were there at the time, and I am trying to see if I can sniff out lies or inconsistencies or unearth new evidence pertaining to the case."

"And if you were to find such evidence, is it too late?"

"If I present a convincing-enough deposition to the prison warden, he has the power to stay the execution. If I am overwhelmingly convincing, there could be a new trial."

"You say you doubt he is innocent?"

He shrugged. "I remember all too well what he was like when he was drinking. In the morning all was forgotten. Quite possibly what happened has been erased from his mind. I am going to see if there is any new proof, one way or the other, and that's all I can do. If he goes to the gallows, so be it."

"It must have been shocking to meet with him under these circumstances. And with your sister so newly gone."

"I haven't told him about that yet."

Enid came over to him, crouching down so that they were at eye level. She touched his cheek, stroking him as if he were a child in need of comfort.

"I am sorry for you, Will."

He reached for her hand and brought it to his lips. Her skin was warm and soft, fragrant with something sweet and flowery. She didn't move away, and it was so natural to put

his other arm around her and pull her close. He kissed her. She raised her arms and enclosed him, pressing against his chest. Murdoch was having trouble breathing, and the position was awkward with Enid somehow half draped across his knees. He managed to part his legs, and she slipped in between them. He wanted to moan with pleasure, and his loins were desperate to take action on their own. He wasn't sure if it was Enid or he that finally ended the kiss, but they stayed like that, clutched together, her cheek hard against his.

"You must be uncomfortable," he whispered, as he kissed her face again and again.

"I am," she said, and moved back to sit on her heels, although she was still between his knees. Her face was flushed, and her eyes shone.

"Mrs. Barrett is away at her sister's until tomorrow night."

He stared at her, wondering why she was telling him this right now. She laughed at him.

"We have complete privacy, Will. If you want it so, that is."

He almost yelped. "Enid!"

She stood up and took his hand. "My bedroom is adjoining. Come."

Stiffly, he got to his feet. She was in charge, and he was only too happy to surrender. If, in spite of everything, Mrs. Jones had determined they would become lovers this night, he would offer no objection. She picked up one of the lamps and pulled back the flowered velvet portieres that draped the door to the bedroom. She had lit a fire here also and already turned down the covers on the bed. The white plump pillows looked soft and welcoming. She smiled at him shyly and gave him another kiss, which lasted for a long time. Finally, she pulled away and indicated the screen in one corner.

"I'll change. You can get undressed by the fire where it's warmer."

Murdoch wasn't sure if he needed to be any warmer than he was, otherwise he'd conflagrate, but he nodded. He was glad he'd sponged down this morning and that his shirt was fresh on yesterday. Enid disappeared behind the screen, and he removed all his clothes. He hesitated at whether or not to take off his woollen combination underwear but decided it might be easier if he did. Naked as a jaybird, he hurried over to the bed and jumped in, pulling up the covers.

Enid emerged. She had wrapped herself in a paisley shawl, but she didn't seem to have anything on either.

"Blow out the light, Will," she said, and he obeyed at once. The flames in the fireplace made dancing shadows on the walls. She came over to the bed, and he made room for her to climb in. He was lying on his back, and she put her arm across his chest. Her skin had gone cool.

"You're shivering," he said. "Are you cold?"

"No. But it is a long time since I have lain with a man."

He buried his face in her hair and spoke into her neck. "Enid, I must tell you I have not had connection with a woman before. I am not sure how to proceed."

She leaned back so she could see into his eyes. "There is nothing to worry about." She rolled away and pulled him on top of her. Her hand slid to his groin. "Trust this fellow; he knows what to do."

Chapter Twenty-eight

A FEW YEARS AGO MARIA NEWCOMBE had purchased an old-fashioned four-poster bed at a country auction. She had replaced the dust-laden curtains with some of claret-coloured velvet, and she liked nothing better in the winter than for her and Vince to get into bed and draw the curtains. They sacrificed some freshness of air for snugness, and she considered it a good trade. At the end of the day, the two of them climbed into bed and pressed closely side by side, discussing the business of the day, going over what needed to be done tomorrow. Maria waited until Vincent had brought up some of the things that were on his mind first. He told her what had happened at the Delaneys'.

"Mrs. Delaney appeared quite afraid. I didn't know the boy was so badly off."

"Mrs. Bowling is a strange woman, I must say. Whenever I've encountered her, she's been quite unfriendly."

Ucillus Bowling had come to live in the Delaney cottage only two years ago. Rumours had soon started about the daughter who some said had the shocking ways of a hoyden. Maria would have been a good neighbour and visited the newcomer, but Ucillus made it clear she did not welcome visitors. The gossips said that did not include male visitors. Maria knew Vincent went to see the woman sometimes, he said. Although she knew she trusted him completely, she couldn't resist jabbing at the sore place when Ucillus was mentioned.

"The problem is Delaney himself wasn't consistent in his treatment of the lad," said Vince, adroitly sidestepping the issue of Mrs. Bowling's aloofness. "You've got to leaven

corrections with kindness unless you only want obedience from fear and not from respect. One minute Philip could have whatever he asked for, the next the very same demand would get him a reprimand. And then would come the temper. I witnessed it more than once.”

In the darkness Maria smiled to herself. Vincent didn’t see any difference between training a dog and raising a child.

“The fellow Williams kept a cool head, I must say,” continued Vincent. “Good man. I wouldn’t like to make an enemy of him, but I’d say he would be a steadfast friend.”

They lay quietly for a while, then she said, “I was thinking I’d go and pay a visit to Jess Lacey. I can take her some bread. From what Walter has said, she is very blue most days.”

“Good old girl,” he said, and kissed the top of her head. She could tell that he was struggling valiantly against sleep, and she murmured her own good night to release him and kissed his hand. She lay against his chest until she heard by his deepening breathing that he had dozed off, then she slipped away from under his arm and turned on her side. Her eyes were open, and she knew sleep would elude her tonight. It was in these moments when there was silence all around her that her fears began to creep to the forefront of her mind. She knew that, if asked, any of their neighbours or customers would describe her as a cheerful woman with a ready smile. She’d heard it said of her many times, but it wasn’t really true. God had not seen fit to give her living children, and the lack had intensified a deep-seated, inner melancholy that only Vince had ever truly seen. She moved her foot backward until she came into contact with her husband’s calf. His nightshirt had ridden up, and she was momentarily comforted by the feeling of his skin against hers. She had wanted to talk to him about the episode with Sally, which had troubled her deeply, but she had also been reluctant to say, even to him, what had happened.

He would probably urge her to tell Walter, but she couldn't bring herself to do so. He was already worried enough about his wife. She knew Lacey cared for his daughter, but he was such an unpredictable moody man, and since Jess lost the babe he seemed much worse. She sometimes wondered if he would ever smile again. Not that she didn't understand the pain of losing a bairn. She did all too well. But there was a living child who needed his attention, and much of the time he behaved as if Sally wasn't there. The child was becoming more invisible by the day. Like a drift of mist in the ravine, a good wind and she would blow away.

Maria sat up, pushed aside the bed curtain, and got out of bed. The fire had died to embers, but the bedroom was still warm. She went over to the window that overlooked the rear garden. The doghouse was directly below, empty now because, since her whelping, Tripper had her box in the taproom. Vince had built the doghouse himself, and Maria had joked that it was better accommodation than many people down in the city enjoyed. She didn't really mind because she, too, loved the dogs, and his devotion to them didn't divert Vince's attention from the needs of their own home. Maria stared downwards, unable to shake off her distress.

When she was only six years old, her mother had died giving birth to her tenth child, the fifth boy, Cecil. The burden of raising the younger children had fallen on the all-too-thin shoulders of her older sisters, Fanny and Martha. To earn money, at harvest time Fanny had taken in minders, children from the village whose parents were away all day in the fields. Mostly Maria was not allowed to play with them, but one day Fanny had been preoccupied with her new sweetheart and Maria had brought her doll to the kitchen where the three other children were playing. Although the two boys were giggling with excitement, she saw at once that it was the bigger girl who was the ringleader. Cecil was on the ground, and one of the boys had a hand over his

mouth so he couldn't cry out. There was such terror in his eyes that Maria had screamed out loud. Fanny came running in; the girl and the two boys were slapped and pulled off. Later that night Maria heard Fanny and Martha whispering together about what had happened. She didn't completely understand what they meant except that something bad had happened to the girl that summer, and she was taking it out on Cecil. She never came back to be minded, and the incident had become a secret of such awful shame that the slightest hint of it made Maria's cheeks turn hot.

She shivered and turned away, too afraid of her own thoughts to tolerate them any longer. Vince muttered something in his sleep, but she couldn't make out the words. She went back to bed, lay down against his broad, strong back, and kissed his shoulder softly. Finally she fell asleep, and her restless dreams were full of scenes in which Cecil became Sally, who lifted her doll's smock and was poking her finger into the crotch.

Moving quietly so as not to wake Walter or Sally, who was in her crib by the fireside, Jess came down the stairs. The moon was full, and there was enough of a layer of snow on the field to throw up a light through the uncurtained windows. She went over to the cupboard and took out the canvas bag where she'd hidden the clothes. Last week she had taken a pair of Walter's corduroys and cut them down to fit her. She added an old navy jersey with a deep roll collar that she knew he wouldn't miss and some heavy, well-darned wool socks. She dressed quickly and went to the door. Her own waterproof cloak was too cumbersome to bother with, and she took Walter's leather coat from the hook and put it on. Her boots and gloves were lined with rabbit fur and were warm. She had to hurry. Walter always woke about midnight so he could keep the fire built up. She knew how worried he would be if he saw her like this, but if

she didn't get out of the confines of her house, she thought she would go mad. Pulling on a grey Persian lamb hood and tucking her hair out of sight, she slipped outside.

Earlier it had been sleeting heavily, but that had stopped and there was a damp snap in the air that she liked.

She struck out toward the steps, liking the feeling of being unencumbered by long skirts. She knew she must look more male than female, and the notion gave her a strange pleasure. How long had she been doing this? Two weeks, three? At first when she had awoken at the predawn hour, she had simply got up quietly so she wouldn't disturb her husband and daughter. She had gone downstairs and wrapped herself in a shawl until it was a decent time to start raking out the stove. She found that moving around helped soothe her, but one time Sally had woken and she had to tend to her. It seemed better to go out of the house. Initially, she had walked around the edges of the little garden several times and then gone back inside. Now this was not enough, and every night she was going further and further afield.

At the fence line she hesitated for a moment, trying to penetrate the darkness of the dense evergreens. The wind had got up, and the trees tossed and rustled. She was about to unbolt the gate when she saw the second offering. Lying across the path on a neat bed of spruce branches was the skinned corpse of a squirrel. The tail and feet were cut off and the skullcap had been opened to expose the brains. Two days ago she had found a rabbit skin in the same place, all cleaned and laid out for her. She turned around and faced the cottage. What could he see? The kitchen window was directly behind her. With the oil lamp lit and no blinds or curtains on the windows, whoever was inside was quite visible.

Jessica's mouth went dry with fear. She picked up the squirrel by the leg and tossed it into the trees. She daren't

risk continuing with her sojourn, and almost sobbing, she went back into the house.

In the hideaway the watcher crouched, waiting for her to come down the steps.

Chapter Twenty-nine

“WILL, WAKE UP ! Wake up!”

Murdoch opened his eyes. Enid was sitting up in bed, leaning over him. Her hair was loose and rumped, and for some reason that stirred a delightful memory.

“We both fell asleep,” she whispered. “You have to go before it gets light.”

He grunted, trying to gather his wits. “What time is it?”

“It’s just after two.”

“That’s all right then, dawn won’t be for many hours. There’s lots of time.”

“No, there isn’t. Please get up, Will. You cannot risk somebody seeing you.”

He pushed himself into a sitting position and rubbed his face hard. Awake now, he suddenly felt awkward. Enid had put on her nightgown, but he was still naked. The knowledge made him as shy as a schoolboy, and he pulled the sheet up to his shoulders. He wanted to talk about what had happened between them, but he felt utterly tongue-tied. Enid went to get off the bed, but he caught her by the arm.

“My sweetest girl ... er, last night was ...” He paused. What do you say to a woman you have just shared the most pleasurable connection with? That was sublime? The most exciting thing he had ever experienced? A relief? Some of the worry left her face, and she smiled at him.

“Oh, Will, you always need to put things into words, don’t you. You should have been a poet.”

This insight into his character was new to him, but her tone was fond. She gave him a quick peck on the cheek,

and he made no attempt to hold her, trying to assess her mood.

She got off the bed and went over to the chair where he had draped his clothes. She brought them over to him.

“Do you want me to light the lamp?”

“No, I can see well enough.”

Tactfully, she turned her back while he got out of bed and slipped into his underwear and woollen vest. He fumbled with the buttons on his trousers, his face hot with embarrassment. When he was fully clothed, he came around to where she was sitting. He took her face in both of his hands and kissed her on the mouth. She didn't resist, but neither did she respond in the same way she had earlier.

“Enid, should I apologise? Did you not want me?”

“Of course you do not have to apologise, Will. Our desire was mutual, but ...”

He finished the sentence for her. “It was a mistake.”

“No. I cannot say that. But there is a promise in intimacy, and I do not know if I can keep it.”

He knew what she meant, although he would like to have pretended he didn't. He stepped back, and this time she was the one who caught him by the arm.

“I've hurt you, Will, and I did not mean to. Forgive me.”

She stood up and slipped her arms around his waist. “Mrs. Barrett is away with her sister tomorrow night as well. I would dearly love to have your company, Will. Say you'll come.”

“Does this mean you are going to keep your promise?”

“For now. And you?”

Even if his mind had been cool enough to refuse, his body could not. “Of course.”

She let him go and he tiptoed down the stairs and let himself out into the dark street. There were no lights showing in any of the houses, and he kept close to the fences where there were more shadows. He realised he was acting as guiltily as if he were a thief returning from a

robbery, and annoyed with himself he veered off the sidewalk and into the centre of the road. He lifted his head, letting the cold night wind blow on his face. He felt as if the delicate smell of Enid's body surrounded him, his hands, his face. If it hadn't been the middle of the night, he would have let out a whoop of sheer joy.

The bell calling her to the chapel had sounded several minutes ago and Mother St. Raphael knew the nuns would be awaiting her. She had hardly slept at all, and the pain in her knees was intense. However, she felt resolved in her actions. She went back to the desk and took out a pen and a sheet of paper. The ink in the inkwell was thickened with the cold and made it difficult to write neatly. She blotted the sheet several times, signed her name, and folded the paper.

There was a light deferential tap on her door.

"Mother Prioress, are you awake? It is the time of compline."

"Yes, yes, Sister. I will be there momentarily."

She picked up Sister Philomena's letter and put it, together with the diary and her other effects, into an envelope, adding her own note. As soon as it was light, she would have the extern take them to Monsieur Lavalley to be posted to Toronto.

Thy will be done .

—

Pugh took three banknotes from his pocket and laid them flat on the dresser. He made a note on a paper wrapper, folded it around the money, and placed them in a flat leather folder. He yawned and walked over to the bed and flopped down on his back. He was so tired he couldn't be bothered to undress, not even to take off his muddy boots. Nevertheless, he knew his excitement wouldn't allow him to

sleep just yet, and he did what he always did at these times. He fished a twenty-five-cent coin out of his pocket, and with his right hand raised in front of his face, he began to practise concealing it in his palm. It was a tricky manoeuvre, especially trying to do it lying down. He held the coin on the tips of his two middle fingers with his thumb, then slid it down into his palm, holding it there by pinching the muscles of his hand together. His hand was supposed to look relaxed and natural, but the effort of holding the coin made his fingers tense and spread out. The twenty-five-cent piece fell out and onto his chest. He picked it up and started again. He pushed the coin down to the palm of his hand again and squeezed it tight.

He smiled to himself. Soon it would all be over. More than a year of work about to pay off. His most persistent and pleasurable daydream was what he would do with all the money, which was more than he had ever earned in his life. He could buy himself a new wheel. A new bicycling suit to go with it. Most of all of course, he would take a short holiday. He could take the train down to New York City, visit some houses of joy that he'd heard of. Cautiously, he let his fingers relax and was still able to hold on to the coin. That looked good.

The shadow at the back of his mind was kept at bay by these pleasant thoughts. He never allowed himself to think about the other people. They were all an audience to him to be tickled, played with, and ultimately gulled. The coin fell out of his hand again, but he didn't retrieve it this time. He closed his eyes. It was not his fault how the law viewed these things.

Chapter Thirty

HIS ALARM CLOCK WAS CLANGING , and Murdoch rolled over and pressed the lever to stop it. He would have happily gone back to sleep for a while longer, but almost immediately there was a tap on his door.

“Mr. Murdoch, here’s your hot water.”

“Thank you, Mrs. K. You can bring it in.”

He pulled his coverlet up around his neck as his landlady opened the door.

“Shall I pour it?”

“You might as well. I’m up, at least I think I am.”

He yawned so hard he thought he was going to swallow himself.

“Did you not sleep well?” Beatrice asked him, as she poured the hot water from the jug into the basin on his washstand. He glanced at her quickly, but her comment seemed without guile. As far as he knew, she had not awakened when he had come home last night, which wasn’t surprising as he was floating at least two inches above the floorboards.

“Thank you, I did, Mrs. K. And yourself?”

“Soundly, thank you. And Arthur had a good night. He was asleep at ten and didn’t stir until three o’clock and then he was only awake for a short while. The laudanum syrup does help him.” She put a towel on the rail. “There you go. I warmed it up by the fire. Shall I light the candle?”

“Yes, please.” He suppressed another yawn and waited for her to leave the room so he could get out of bed. At the door, she paused.

“Did you have a pleasant visit with Mrs. Jones?”

"Yes, indeed, very pleasant."

"I'm glad to hear that."

"She has asked me to have dinner with her tonight, so you needn't put anything up for me."

Beatrice frowned. He knew why. Although she liked Enid, the young widow was not a Roman Catholic, and Mrs. Kitchen would never be reconciled to a match between her and Murdoch. One evening's visit was acceptable; a second closely following was not.

"Breakfast in ten minutes?"

"That would suit very well. I want to go directly to the Coroner's office and see if he will give me an appointment."

"I'll let you get on then," she said, and left. Murdoch got out of bed and shuffled into his slippers. Moving hurriedly to combat the cold of the room, he tugged off his nightshirt and got dressed. The steam from the hot water was evaporating by the second. He sharpened his razor on the leather strop, dipped the shaving brush in the water, and whipped up a lather in the soap.

At one point in the night, Enid had stroked his eyes and murmured something in Welsh. "Translation please, madam," he had said, and she had kissed his lids one at a time. "There is too much weariness there."

This morning, in the gloom of the early morning and with a short night's sleep, he could see what she meant. There were dark shadows underneath his eyes, and his eyelids felt itchy and puffy. He daubed on the lather, then drew the razor down the line of his jaw and flicked off the wiped soap onto the towel. Unbidden, a memory flashed into his mind of him as a boy standing by the kitchen sink watching his father shave. The razor had made a scratchy noise as he'd scraped it down his cheeks. In the winter Harry grew a moustache and straggly beard, but in the summer he went clean shaven, more or less. If he was on a binge, he didn't wash or shave for days at a time.

“Can we think of something more uplifting,” said Murdoch out loud to his own reflection. “Perhaps the delectable Mrs. Jones, for instance.”

He cupped his hands and scooped up water, already tepid, and washed his face. Perhaps Enid had not been as disingenuous as it had at first appeared. She knew Mrs. Barrett was away from home, and she had deliberately packed her son off to bed early. That was a big step for a respectable Baptist. He grinned to himself, not minding at all. He dried himself off and scrutinised the job he’d done shaving. Damnation. He’d nicked the underside of his chin, and there was a spot of blood on his white collar. He rubbed at it with a wet finger and only succeeded in spreading out the stain. He sighed. He didn’t have a clean one; this would have to do until Mrs. Kitchen could wash one for him. Enid said there was promise in intimacy, and she was right about that. He could see himself as the most faithful of men for the rest of his life. The religious issue, the huge differences between them, didn’t seem important at the moment. A small hill to climb, not an insurmountable Everest.

From downstairs, he heard the tinkle of the silver bell that Mrs. Kitchen used to summon him to breakfast. He dabbed at the nick on his chin again and hurried out of his room. At the top of the stairs, he leaned over the rail and called down.

“I’ll be right there, Mrs. K. Got to do something for a minute.” And he went down the hall to his sitting room. There was an old sideboard in there, where he kept odds and ends of stuff. He flung open the door and stared inside. Yes. He thought he had some notepaper and envelopes somewhere. No ink though. If he wanted that, he would have to ask his landlady. A pencil would have to do. There was a stubby one at the back of the cupboard. He blew off the dust, took a piece of paper, and sat down in his armchair to write. Damnation, he needed something to lean

on. He jumped up, got a book from the bookcase, and started his letter.

Dear Enid. No, dear sweet, and darling Enid. You were in my arms last night and made me the happiest of men. I am eagerness itself to see you again.

Ugh. What sops. It was embarrassing. Suddenly a memory of Liza came into his mind. He had called her his sweet and his darling, and she had laughed at him. "You don't have to decorate your feelings with silk and bows, Will; plain and unadorned is good enough for me." But Enid had said he was a poet always searching for the right words. He tore the sheet of paper into shreds and began again.

Dear Enid. I look forward to seeing you this evening. You are so beautiful when your long, dark hair is loosened about your shoulders.

He was going to cross that out, but it looked rude as if he had changed his mind. And that was his last sheet. He left it, folded the paper, put it in an envelope, and stowed that in his pocket. As he went to replace the book on the shelf, he saw it was one that Liza had given him for a birthday present. He touched it gently as if it were Liza herself. "Forgive me, dearest," he whispered.

After a rather unappetising breakfast of blood sausage and hard eggs, which he gulped down quickly, he headed out for Dr. Semple's office, which was over on Mutual Street near St. Michael's Cathedral. There was a fancy hotel at the corner of Church Street and Gerrard, and usually a boy earned a few cents by keeping the sidewalk clear of snow so that the hotel guests could have an easy walk to the streetcar when it came by. Sure enough, there was a ragged-looking urchin leaning against the wall, waiting for customers. His hair was cut short, usually a sign of lice, and he'd wrapped a woollen scarf around his head to keep

himself warm. His jacket and knickerbockers were patched and grimy and looked as if they had been passed through several other owners before getting to him. There was a strip of wind-reddened skin where the knickerbockers ended and his boots began. Murdoch beckoned to him.

"You, Titch. Come over here. Do you want to do an errand for me? I'd like a letter delivered."

The boy didn't move. He had a hard-looking face, too old for his size, and his eyes were dull, a boy who had already acquired a cynical view of the world.

"Where to?"

"Over on Sackville Street."

"What's the dibs?" "Five cents."

The boy turned down the corners of his mouth. "I'll get twice as much as that if I stay right here. I can do three or four ladies in the time it'll take me to get there and back."

"They're not shopping this early in the morning, so don't give me that guff. I'm making a good offer; take it or leave it. I'll find another lad in a wink."

"I ain't seen nobody else about yet, and you look like a man who's in a hurry."

"Ten cents then and not a penny more."

"All right." The boy approached him and held out his hand for the letter. He didn't have any gloves but was making do with a pair of socks pulled over his fingers like mittens. There was an angry red sore by the side of his mouth.

Murdoch had written Enid's address on the envelope. "Can you read?"

"No."

"Numbers?"

"Yes."

Murdoch pointed to the envelope. "It's number three one four on Sackville Street. The door is brown. Ask for Mrs. Jones. Got that?" Murdoch gave him a light flick on the side

of his head. "If I hear you didn't deliver it, I'm going to come back and tan your hide. I'm a police officer. A detective."

The boy stowed the letter inside his jacket with elaborate care. "Is this official business then?"

"Never mind. Just go. Now!"

The arab turned and trotted off.

"Hey, Titch, wait a minute. What's your name?"

"Billy."

"From William?"

"I suppose so."

"That's my name, too, William Murdoch."

"Is it?"

There was something disconcerting in the look he gave Murdoch. There was nothing endearing about this boy.

"Go on then, young Billy. Do your job."

Murdoch watched him out of sight, then continued on his way toward Mutual Street. He was accustomed to the presence of boys who were scrabbling for money by doing what this urchin did or by selling newspapers or holding horses while the owners went visiting or shopping. The truant officers couldn't keep them in school usually because what they earned was needed by the family, almost always too large, often in the care of a woman only. He didn't know why he should be more sympathetic towards one of them today, but he was. He felt miserly that he'd only given the boy ten cents, although he knew most people would only have given him a couple of cents at a time. Murdoch looked up at the sky. The sun had struggled out, and there were blue patches in the sky. He grinned like a fool at the sight. It was amazing what a good and generous mood having loving connections with a woman put a man in.

Patrick Pugh couldn't believe his good luck. He'd been heading down Church Street to make his report when he saw the exchange between Murdoch and the street arab. He

slowed his pace, keeping his hat well down over his face, and when Murdoch had continued on, he set off after the boy.

Chapter Thirty-one

MURDOCH'S KNOCK WAS ANSWERED PROMPTLY by an elderly manservant whose manner was so gracious he could easily have been mistaken for the master of the house.

"Good morning, sir."

Murdoch handed him his card. "My name is William Murdoch, and I'm a detective at Number Four Station. I wonder if I might have a word with Dr. Semple on a professional matter."

"Do you have an appointment, sir?"

"No, I'm afraid not."

"Please step inside. I will see if he is available."

Murdoch entered. The hall was well lit with gas wall brackets and a large central chandelier.

The butler soon returned. "Dr. Semple is working in his laboratory, but he can give you a brief interview. We can go in directly. I'll take your hat and coat. Chilly morning, isn't it?"

Murdoch agreed that it was and divested himself of his long coat and his Astrakhan hat, not for the first time feeling somewhat ashamed of the shabbiness of both. Not that the butler with his impeccable manners gave any indication he was aware of this. Murdoch wondered where the man had come from.

After his apparel was duly hung on the coat tree, the butler led the way down the hall and tapped deferentially on a closed door to the right. There were no softening portieres, and the door itself might have suited a castle with its ostentatious brass doorknob and prominent keyhole. There was an unpleasant smell in the air, and for a moment

Murdoch feared his sealskin coat had been reeking again. However, he realised this odour was too pungent and too close. It was also more like rotting meat than fish.

“Enter.”

Murdoch was ushered into Dr. Semple’s laboratory.

The stench of decay was like an assault. A tall, skinny man in a brown Holland smock was standing at a bench with his back to the door. He made a note on a pad of paper and turned to greet Murdoch.

“Good morning, Inspector. Forgive me the informality, but I’m under the gun to get some results and I can’t spare you much time.” In spite of the words, his tone was friendly. “I won’t shake hands either. I’ve been messing around with cadavers, and you wouldn’t want that on your fingers.” He waved his hand vaguely. “I suppose the place stinks to high heaven, does it? When you are in here for a while you get used to it. I thought you looked a little taken aback when you came in.”

“There is a rather strong odour, I must admit.”

“I’m doing a post mortem examination, that’s why.”

He stepped back and Murdoch saw what his body had shielded. For one brief moment, he thought he was looking at a doll, but then he realised it was an infant. The scalp was pulled down over the face like a red mask revealing the grey convolutions of the brain. The chest cavity was gaping open. The rest of the body was ash white. A male child.

“A young woman is up on a murder charge. Usual story. Silly girl got herself in the family way and was afraid to tell in case she lost her position. The baby must have come early, and she stuffed it into a valise and left it under a tree in the nearby field. She says it was stillborn, but I’ve got to determine that. It is possible she suffocated it as soon as it came out. There’s no milk in the stomach, but the lungs do show some air. That is not necessarily conclusive of course. We know that in some circumstances an infant will breathe while still in the womb. Look, what do you think?”

There was a little heap of what looked like fresh calves' liver on the bench, and the doctor sawed off a piece and dropped it into a glass tank filled with water that was in front of him. The fragment of lung floated for a moment then slowly started to sink to the bottom of the tank. Semple reached into the water and squeezed the tissue between his thumb and forefinger. "See, no air at all. I'm inclined to think the infant didn't breathe. There is some meconium in the intestines, which is typical of stillborns." His voice had the resonance of a man accustomed to lecturing. Murdoch knew the doctor was a demonstrator at the Toronto school of medicine. He was suddenly aware that there were several glass jars on a shelf to the right of them that contained pickled embryos. Semple noticed where he was looking.

"Each of those specimens show a foetus at different stages of development in utero. My little fellow looks to be about six months, which is consistent with what the mother said and with life being unsustainable."

He leaned his knuckles on the bench, lecturer style. "Of course, some women are altogether too cunning and will kill by virtually undetectable means." He illustrated his words by pulling up his own eyelid. "A needle thrust in here will cause death at once, or here." He indicated his lower spine. "However, I see no indication that took place or any suspicion of suffocation or a broken neck."

Murdoch's feelings must have revealed themselves because Semple grinned.

"Beg your pardon. Got carried away for a moment. Too many hours in the lecture room." He cut off another piece of lung and tossed it into the water. This time the tissue hardly floated at all.

"There we go then. That's a relief. I hate being the one to condemn a woman to the gallows unless it's totally certain." He started to wipe his hands on a rag. "Not that a jury will

bring in a verdict for hanging. Women get too much sympathy. Pity really," he added ambiguously.

Suddenly, he swivelled around and removed a pile of papers from a high stool.

"Take your weight off your beaters." He patted the stool.

Dr. Semple spoke with a slight Irish brogue and had the typical colouring of a Celt: fair skin, blue eyes, and black hair, which was slicked smooth across his head to hide his premature balding. His moustache was thick and in need of a trim, the ends looking as if he sucked on them in moments of contemplation. He looked about the same age as Murdoch himself.

"Now, Inspector, what can I do for you? You said you had an urgent matter."

"Not inspector, Dr. Semple, merely acting detective. I just wanted to verify a few details of a case at which you were the medical witness."

"And why is that?" asked Semple, and his voice was sharp.

"The accused denies his guilt, and I have agreed to go over the evidence again."

"Have you indeed? That's unusual, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right, what was the case?"

"The man is named Henry or Harry Murdoch. He was charged with murder on August four of this year. He has been convicted and is sentenced to hang on Monday."

Semple frowned. "Isn't your name Murdoch, or did I get it wrong? Any relation?"

"The accused is my father, sir. I have only just discovered his situation."

"Bad luck. Not intent on proving we were all wrong, I hope. Waste of time if you are."

He wasn't hostile, just a busy man.

"I have no particular aim except to make sure that all the evidence is, as you say, conclusive." He hesitated but he liked Semple's no-nonsense manner and answered in kind.

"As perhaps you can imagine, I would sleep easier if I knew I had done everything I could."

"Quite. What would you like to know from me then?"

"I was hoping you would go over the evidence again with me. Show me exactly why you reached the conclusions you did."

Semple clicked his teeth. "Very well. The Armstrong case is done really." He threw a cloth over the dead baby. "However, I do have to set up an experiment for my class this afternoon. It won't take but a moment."

Most of one wall of the laboratory consisted of long, uncurtained windows. On each side were several wicker cages, which contained two or three sparrows. They weren't moving or attempting to fly around their small prisons but sat on the perches, their heads tucked down into their feathers. Semple opened a cupboard below the bench and removed a bottle labelled CHLORINE . He unscrewed the lid, and the pungent odour made Murdoch cough immediately. Semple poured a capful into an empty beaker and replaced the lid.

"As you just experienced, this gas had a considerable inflammatory effect on the air passages. Too much of it will kill. Don't worry, you only had a whiff. I myself seem to have become impervious to it. People can work in an atmosphere of chlorine with impunity and become immune. They do, however, always lose weight and remain thin. We're not quite sure why that is."

He measured out some water into another beaker, took a syringe from an open case on the bench, and drew up some of the chlorine into the needle.

"Now, I add the water to the two-hundredth part, and we're ready." He laid down the syringe and reached into one of the cages. The sparrows fluttered and chirruped, but he caught one of them and drew it out. "I have to demonstrate how the blood responds to the chlorine. Sorry, little fellow,"

he said to the bird, who opened its beak silently. With a practised motion, Semple injected the chlorine solution and replaced the creature carefully in the cage. He checked a large clock that was beside him and made a note in his book.

“Should take less than five minutes.”

Then he walked across the room to a large metal filing cabinet and pulled open one of the drawers. Murdoch couldn't take his eyes off the sparrow, which was now obviously gasping for air. The other birds shifted along the tree branch out of the way.

“Here we are, *Regina v. Henry Murdoch.*”

He turned back to Semple, who had a folder in his hands.

Murdoch heard a soft noise from the cage, and he saw that the bird had fallen to the bottom of the cage and was lying on its side, feet stretched out like a wooden toy. It was dead.

Semple came over and looked at the clock. “Hmm. That didn't take long. Let me just make a note of the time, and then we can go over your file.”

Murdoch swivelled the high stool away so he could no longer see the cage.

Chapter Thirty-two

MURDOCH HAD BEEN ABLE TO SEND a telephone message from Dr. Semple's office to say he was coming to the jail, and Harry was waiting for him in the visiting room. For an instant he caught an unguarded expression on his father's face of such despair and darkness that it was like a stab into his own chest. However, Harry smiled up at him.

"Thought you'd never get here, Will."

"I came as soon as I could." He nodded at the guard. "I brought in a couple of plugs if you'd care for one, Mr. Barker."

"I won't say no to that, sir."

Murdoch handed over his little package of Jolly Tar, and the guard tipped his cap. "I'll leave you to your chin wag then. I'm right outside the door if you need me." He left.

Murdoch took another bag from his pocket and gave it to Harry. "I got Bull Durham today."

"That's a good one," Harry said. "Funny thing is, I've almost lost my craving. Never thought that would happen. I'll hold off for a bit." He pushed a piece of drawing paper across the table. "Do you know who this is?"

The pencil sketch was of a woman's head, half in profile, smiling down at a flower she was holding. She was unmistakable.

"It's Mother."

"She's young there, of course. My first sight of her. I forget what she was looking at, so I made it a flower. She was a pretty lass back then. Fair took my heart."

Murdoch had never to his knowledge heard his father make any public declaration of affection for his mother. He

could not conceal his astonishment or his disgust. Harry took back the sketch.

"It's writ all over your face what you're thinking. But I did care for her, Will."

"Did you? It might have made her life happier if you had showed it."

Harry didn't react. "I know that and I'm sorry for the way I was." He rubbed at his head with the now familiar gesture. "How many times am I going to have to repeat it?"

Murdoch wanted to snap at him, *A dozen more times? A hundred? Forever?* However, his temper was held in check by the sight of his father's distress.

"Let's get to the matter at hand. I'm here to give you an up-to-date report."

"I can tell it's nothing I haven't heard already."

Murdoch shrugged. "So far nothing new has come to light. I went into the ravine first to get a look around."

"Did the trees talk to you, Will?"

Harry smiled slightly to show he meant this as a joke, and suddenly Murdoch remembered how he'd been teased as a child when he was adamant that he could converse with the trees.

"I'm raising a lass, not a lad," Harry had said.

"I only wish they could. We'd know unequivocally, wouldn't we. However, there is something I'd like to ask you. I'll come back to it in a minute. I met up with Walter Lacey, the hired man ..."

"Ah yes. He took a scunner to me. That didn't help my case at all."

"I didn't say we were related, just that I was investigating the case privately."

Harry nodded. "Better that way."

"I talked to Newcombe. He didn't add anything. While I was there Mr. Pugh arrived together with Mr. Craig. I understand his son is back to courting Miss Delaney.

Newcombe said that her father had forbidden the relationship earlier."

Harry leaned forward. "I hadn't heard that."

"I doubt it has much significance. According to the trial report, Miss Craig swore under oath that her father and brother were at home from eight-fifteen that evening and did not leave."

"She could be lying."

"Was that your impression?"

"Frankly, I wasn't paying a whole lot of attention. I might have if I'd known James was after the Delaney girl."

"Let's not go galloping after the fox too soon. Newcombe didn't think James was too chagrined by the father's edict. Miss Delaney apparently was."

"Maybe she met up with her father and quarrelled with him. Damnation, why didn't Clement pursue this? I told you they had all passed verdict on me from the beginning."

"You forget that Mrs. Delaney was on the witness stand. She said both her son and daughter were in the house all evening. She and Miss Delaney were apparently making a quilt together. But I suppose she, too, could be lying to protect her daughter."

He could see Harry wince at his tone. "It isn't out of the question, Will. You seem able to accept that I am lying but not that these women might be."

Murdoch let that pass. "This morning I visited the doctor who conducted the post mortem. Shall we go over his evidence again? First, the bruise on your cheek, the blood on your right shirtsleeve and cuff ..."

"That was from my dog."

Murdoch let that go. Semple had told him they could not distinguish between human and animal blood even with the most powerful microscopes they had. "However, we can distinguish different fibres, and we can tell human and dog hair apart. Look, I'll show you."

He was proud of his microscope, which he assured Murdoch was the best and most up-to-date money could buy. He insisted Murdoch press his eye to the lens while he inserted a slide.

"Here are three different strands of hair. This first one is from a spaniel. The second is from a horse. You can see it is much wider and coarser. The third is human hair, and the transverse lines are much finer."

At this point Semple had paused. "I consider this the most damning piece of evidence I collected. Even though he was in the water, some strands of hair were caught on Delaney's shirt and not washed away. I discovered them, dried them, and magnified them so. This hair, as you can see even with the naked eye, is dark. Henry Murdoch's hair is quite dark. Delaney's is light, grey in fact. But here, look. Under the microscope, you can see that each strand still has the root capsule attached. It suggests to me that the two men did fight and fight viciously, to the extent that Delaney pulled out some of Henry's hair by the roots."

Murdoch related this to his father, who listened quietly. "Yes, he blathered on about that. He kept saying all the evidence, but what did they have when it come down to it? A bruise on my face, blood stains, bits of hair. Could be anybody's."

Harry rubbed his head as vigorously as if he had nits. Murdoch knew he must have appeared in the exact same way while he was in the court, and he could see how unprepossessing he was. It would have been hard to convince a jury he was innocent.

"He showed me the photographs he'd had taken of the dead man. The wounds seemed to indicate that the blows were coming at a downward angle. The assailant was therefore taller than Delaney."

Suddenly Harry thumped his fist on the table. "No, Will, goddamn it! I'm not a total fool. My counsel nailed him on that matter, and he admitted that Delaney might have been

pushed to the ground. If he was even on one knee, the blows would have come at that kind of angle. His killer didn't have to be bigger than him. Semple agreed. Did he tell you that, or have you chosen to ignore it?"

In fact, the doctor had told Murdoch of all the possibilities.

He pushed back his chair, walked down the length of the table, and studied the photograph of Her Majesty. With his back to Harry, he said, "As we say in the police world, give me opportunity and motivation and I will show you the criminal. You had both, it seems."

"I admit I was in a temper with Delaney, but that doesn't mean you go out and kill the man. We wouldn't have much of a population left if that were the case."

Murdoch came back to his seat. "You have asked me to do everything I can to help you, but how can I?" He met his father's eyes. "You are still lying. Unless you tell me the absolute truth, I will have to put a stop to any further investigations."

"I ..."

"Of course you had a fight with Delaney. You purposely went into the ravine to wait for him. You had no other reason to be there. When he came along the path, you had an argument during which he struck you on the cheek and quite possibly grabbed you by the hair."

Harry flushed. "That's it then. You think I'm guilty as charged?"

"I didn't say that. I am just asking for some honesty here. Did you or did you not have a fight with Delaney?"

"I don't know!" Harry yelled. He glared at Murdoch for a moment then quickly looked away. "Lately I have had vague recollections. I've thought so much I can hardly tell if they're dreams or real, but I can see his face, him standing over me. I assume he had clobbered me one. After that, it's totally blank. I sort of remember crawling off into the bushes, but that's all. Then there's a man leaning over me telling me Delaney is dead. They made a lot of what I said,

but I thought there'd been an accident. I was still in a bad skin. What I said didn't mean anything."

"And this has just come back to you?"

Another pause while Harry considered what to say. "Not just now. I did know it when I was tried, but I'd already denied any fight so I thought it wiser to say nothing." He shrugged. "Didn't seem to make a difference one way or the other."

Murdoch reached for the piece of drawing paper. "Do you mind if I use this?"

"Go ahead."

He took out his fountain pen, reversed the paper, and did a quick sketch.

"Here's the bridge at the bottom of the ravine. Here's the creek and the path that goes to the right. You were found here, Delaney's body was in the water, just there, a few feet up from you. Why was he on that path? His house is the other way. I assume you would have been lying in wait for him at the bridge."

Harry studied the drawing. "I wish I could say I remember, but I don't any more than I just said. We might have been moving and shoving each other, but I don't know."

"There are some other things I'd like to clarify. You accused Delaney of distracting your dog during the match by whistling at him. But he didn't have a whistle on him. He emptied his pockets."

"Ah, that one I am clear about. There are special dog whistles called mouth whistles. They use them for sheepdogs in Scotland. They're made of bone, triangular shaped, quite small. Real easy to conceal. I know he distracted Havoc."

"Could it have been one of the others?"

"Not likely. Flash was the one to beat. One more rat and we would have won the match. That's when he did it."

"All right. We'll let that go for now. Did you let Havoc out of his box when you went into the ravine?"

“What?”

“Newcombe says you put the dog in a box and left the tavern. But Mr. Pugh said Havoc was on the loose and barking at him, which was how he discovered you.”

“I have no recollection. Sometimes Havoc has got out. He’s a cunning little fellow. Is it important?”

“Probably not. Just another loose end I’m trying to tie up.”

Harry actually glanced with admiration at his son. “You’re thorough, Will. I thought you would be. You take after me in that regard. Did you locate the dog, by the way?”

“Yes, Newcombe was looking after him. He’s currently with somebody I know. A dog fancier.”

“I’m glad to hear it.”

Harry looked as if he was about to discuss the dog’s future. Murdoch didn’t want to get into what might possibly happen to Havoc, and he moved on quickly.

“The money that was gone from Delaney’s pouch. Any more vague recollections about that you haven’t mentioned?”

“None.”

“You’re sure you didn’t take back what you considered your rightful money?”

“If I did, where is it?” Harry gave a wry smile. “Even full to the gills, I can’t see myself taking money then letting it blow away in the wind.”

“You could have hidden it.”

“I don’t believe I was capable of that much effort. But I was thinking about that, too. What’s to say Delaney didn’t hand over some of his bills before he met up with me?”

“Nobody came forward.”

“They wouldn’t, would they, if they was the one who killed him?”

“In which case the encounter would have occurred after yours.”

Harry rubbed his head again. “Right. I’m not thinking straight. But say this unknown somebody felt cheated like I

did. He confronts Delaney and demands money. Delaney hands over something but not enough. More argument and this person clobbers him, then rolls his body into the creek."

"Any candidates? You were the one at the match. Who was the sore loser? Other than you?"

"Nobody lost too much, except me and Pugh. He coughed up the most. He wasn't complaining, mind, but he could have been hiding it."

"He has a solid alibi. He was with Newcombe the entire time."

Harry sighed. "We're going round in circles."

"I have put somebody on the man White's track. As you know, he too has an alibi. He went with the Craigs."

"I heard that, but what's to say he didn't double back and follow Delaney?"

"Why would he? He didn't lose money."

"He didn't win either. Maybe he had grand expectations. I wasn't the only one tossing back brew. If he was all hotted up, he could have gone after Delaney. Especially if he believed me that Delaney was a cheat."

"We'll know better when we find him. If we do."

Harry reached for the bag of tobacco and began to stuff the bowl of his pipe. Murdoch waited while he lit up and drew. When he spoke his voice was neutral, but Murdoch knew that was an effort.

"You sound as if you've given up."

"That implies I ever started. I don't know if that is the case."

Harry put his pipe on the table and pushed back his chair. "I can't just sit here while you gloat over me, Will. If you want to come back, I'd be glad. If you don't ..." He didn't finish, but he stood up ready to go to the door.

Murdoch could feel his face going hot. It was true what his father said. He'd been relishing this strange experience of power over the man who had created so much terror around him. But he was also ashamed of himself. It was like fighting

a cripple. Harry could not retaliate. His only hope lay with his son.

“Wait!”

Harry turned around.

“I apologise. I realise you have been relying on me.”

“Indeed I have.”

“Frankly, I don’t know what the truth is, but I promise you I will do what I can to find out.”

Harry returned to the table, reached over, and squeezed Murdoch’s shoulder.

“I’m grateful, Will. I don’t know anybody I’d trust more than you.”

Briefly, Murdoch patted his father’s hand. He felt almost unbearably awkward with this new softness.

The guard entered. “We’ve got to go to the yard, Harry.”

“I’ll come back as soon as I can,” said Murdoch.

Barker took Harry’s arm and led him out of the room. Murdoch remained where he was.

Chapter Thirty-three

MURDOCH MADE HIS WAY HOME in what could only be described as a trance. He was half aware that the wind was cutting and there weren't many people abroad, but as he was turning onto Ontario Street he realised he had no recollection of getting there. He was like an old horse who follows the same route back to the stable without need of guidance.

"Mr. Murdoch! Mr. Murdoch, wait up a minute!"

The voice was behind him, and he turned to see Samuel Quinn hurrying down the street. He had two dogs on leashes trotting beside him. Havoc gave no sign of recognition, but Princess was flamboyantly happy to see him, letting out her high-pitched yips. Murdoch stopped to allow them to catch up to him and held out his hand to the hound who was straining at her leash in her eagerness.

"Hello, Princess, hello."

She showered soppy kisses on his face.

"Enough, old girl. I'm going to drown." He pushed her away and managed to reach Havoc. He was able to give him a quick scratch on the head before the dog ducked away. There was the lifting of the lip and a growl, but to Murdoch it looked more perfunctory than before.

"How's he doing?" he asked Quinn.

"Good. The abscess is healing nicely. Princess is teaching him some manners, and he's the better for it. Aren't you, boyo?"

He bent down and playfully tapped the dog on the nose. Havoc wagged his tail with pleasure.

"Hey. He doesn't do that with me," said Murdoch.

"He will. He just has to get to know you. He likes to play."

Quinn pulled out the remnants of a leather glove from his pocket and dangled it in front of Havoc's face. The dog pounced on it, and they had a little tugging match.

"Out!" said Quinn, and Havoc dropped his end of the glove at once. His eyes were bright, and his tail wagged wildly. Princess, in the meantime, had seized the opportunity to give Murdoch's boots and trouser bottoms a minute inspection. Quinn put the glove back in his pocket. "I'm glad to have caught you, Mr. Murdoch. I have some interesting information for you."

In spite of himself, Murdoch felt a surge of excitement.

"Come on in then."

Dogs in tow, Quinn followed him into the house. Mrs. Kitchen came bustling out of the kitchen to greet them.

"My, my, what sweet dogs."

"Mrs. Kitchen, this is Mr. Quinn. You've heard me mention him."

"How do you do, ma'am," said Quinn, with an old-fashioned bow that obviously won Beatrice over immediately.

"This wicked hound is the famous Princess, and the piece of hearth rug is Havoc," Murdoch continued.

"Say hello," said Quinn to his dog, and Princess sat obediently and held out her paw. Mrs. Kitchen laughed and shook it.

"Could I impose on you for a pot of tea, Mrs. K.? And some biscuits, if you have any."

It might have been his imagination, but Samuel looked peckish. His pockmarked face was reddened by the cold, giving him a rather ferocious expression that was quite at odds with his cheerful nature.

"You can go into the parlour," said Mrs. Kitchen. "You both look perished, if you don't mind my saying so. Why don't I take the dogs to the kitchen and give them a biscuit."

"Thank you, ma'am, but I do warn you, Princess here is a bottomless pit."

The hound wagged her tail on hearing her name but seemed to recognise a benefactor when she saw one and trotted after Mrs. K. down the hall. Havoc went with her.

"Give me your coat and hat, Mr. Quinn," said Murdoch.

Quinn unwrapped his long muffler and unthinkingly wiped his nose on his jacket sleeve.

"Cold out there."

Murdoch ushered him into the parlour, which was cheery with the fire and lit lamps. Quinn perched on the nearest chair and launched into his report.

"I asked around like you said, Mr. Murdoch, and I hit gold, wood, and you might say, tin."

"Hold on a minute, let me write this down." Murdoch took out his notebook and fountain pen. "Go on, if you please."

"Wood first. That is to say, the plain unvarnished." He ticked off on his fingers as he spoke. "First, the grey pugs belong to an English gentleman and his son. They haven't been here too long, but they play when they can. Good dogs, nothing special. Sometimes they win; sometimes they don't. Owners never wager too high. Steady is the word. No whispers about them so far. The Manchesters, Flash and Tripper, are high dogs. Everybody who's in the know wants a whelp from them. Newcombe is well known in the Fancy, and is trusted by them that don't trust many."

"What's the tittle-tattle on John Delaney? Was he likely to cheat? Distract a dog that was about to win the match?"

Quinn considered the question carefully, an important one in the gaming circuit.

"His feist was so damn good, he never needed to duck. Then sometimes that brings its own trouble; no man likes to be knocked off his perch. Mr. Murdoch, your, er, your father, was recent here, too. Good dog but ..."

He hesitated.

"Go on, you won't offend me. What did he say about Harry?"

"Bad loser. Wagered too high a lot of the time, but his dog is a game feist and he did get money back often enough."

Mrs. Kitchen entered at that moment with a tea tray, and he waited while she busied herself putting out the cups and saucers and tea paraphernalia.

"The scones just came out of the oven. Let me know if you need anything else," she said, and left them alone.

Quinn bit into one of the hot cakes that she had brought. Murdoch had been right, he was hungry, but first he tasted the cake with professional interest.

"A little heavy on the baking soda," he said, but nevertheless crammed the cake into his mouth. Murdoch waited until he had room to continue and sipped at his own cup of tea, welcoming the strong, sweet brew. He felt as if a chunk of ice was sitting in his stomach.

"Good, Sam. Please go on."

"Tin next then. A little disappointing, I'm afraid. This Mr. White. My chum knew of him at once. Game little feist, he runs. He's a swell for sure, from the city, and my friend says he'd lay odds of two to one he's in the law profession. Odds of four to one, he's a physician, and odds of ten to one, he's a banker. He uses various names, White, Green, Brown." Quinn grinned. "Not too imaginative, is he? According to my pal, he's a gambling man bar none. He'd wager on anything, horses, dogs, fleas, if they were running." Quinn flicked crumbs off his moustache and reached for another cake. "He's not canny though and loses a lot of money. Doesn't seem to stop him, so he must be born in the silver. Unfortunately, my chum didn't know what his real name is or where he can be found."

"Nothing more than that?"

"'Fraid not." Quinn frowned, trying to come up with something else, but there wasn't anything. "Sorry."

"That's all right. It gives me something to go on. I can check registries. So what was the gold?"

Quinn leaned forward, his hands on his knees.

“My chum has a brother who is a breeder. Not big, just two bitches and one male. Bulldogs. According to brother, in the summer this cull approached him. Said that he was a writer for a newspaper in America, and he was writing an article about bulldogs. He wanted to see how they reacted to rats, for instance, and could he hire his dog. ‘Oh no,’ says brother, ‘you’re not having my prize dog to get all bit up and infected by no rats.’ ‘Oh no,’ says the man. ‘First, he’s no prize.’ Too true, Mr. Murdoch. ‘Second, I’ll pay for any damages that might be incurred, plus a good sum for taking him for the day.’ And it was a good sum; brother couldn’t turn it down. So off they go and the dog – Gargoyle is his name, ugly beast – is returned safe and sound to brother, but the next day not as promised. ‘Got delayed,’ says the cove, and coughed up more dosh. ‘Did you get what you wanted?’ asks brother. ‘Unfortunately, I did not,’ says the cove. ‘Well, I told you right off he wasn’t a fighter,’ says brother. ‘Give him a bear and he’ll go to the death, but he ain’t interested in rodents.’ The cove didn’t answer to that. ‘Won’t you be writing your article now?’ asked brother. ‘No, I won’t’ is the reply, ‘but here’s an extra dollar for your troubles and one more if you keep all this under your hat. Pride, don’t you know.’ Brother didn’t see what was shameful about taking in a dog that wouldn’t do his stuff, but it takes all sorts to make a stew, as we say.”

“Did this man give a name?”

“He did and he didn’t. Brother has found it wiser to forget any information given out to him in certain circumstances.”

“In other words, he wouldn’t say what the man’s name was.”

“That’s it.”

Murdoch tapped the tips of his fingers together. “When did all this hiring and returning take place?”

“Last summer. Early August. Don’t know which day exactly, but I did go and speak to brother myself and near as he could remember it was the first Sunday in the month.”

"Could he describe this man? Or is that also something he won't do?"

"He didn't mind that. Said he was a nondescript sort of fellow. Not too tall, quite stout, maybe just past thirty. Said it was hard to tell if he was a workingman or not. Softish hands but his clothes were quite decent."

"He didn't mention a streak of white hair in front?"

"No. As I said, he was hard put to describe the man at all. 'Bland as blancmange' was the very words he used. Except for one thing ... he had the tip of his middle finger missing. Left hand. Said he'd got it caught in a rat trap."

Murdoch frowned. "Did Pugh get somebody to negotiate for him, I wonder? He definitely told Newcombe the dog was his. He said he'd had him two weeks."

"Well, that's a nailer. Brother would never part with that cur. Not for any price. Hire him out, yes; sell, no." Quinn gulped down his tea. "I'll tell you what I think, Mr. Murdoch. If you would like my opinion, that is."

"I would indeed."

"There's always some silly culls who want to be one of the Fancy no matter what, but they don't really care to do the work: the breeding and the training. It's not just instinct, you know. You have to get the dogs moving faster than they would normally, and they have to ignore the rats they've killed. That's not natural to a terrier. Fellows like this one, they're the kind who'd enter a donkey in the Queen's Plate with the Thoroughbreds just so they could say they've done it. Anyway, that's my view."

"You're probably right. He certainly didn't seem to mind that he lost every round. I suppose his story to your friend could also be true."

"Actually, brother didn't believe that at all. He said he'd lay even money that was just thrown out to give the whore a hat."

"Beg pardon?"

“Sorry, Mr. Murdoch. I meant, to make things look more respectable than they are.” He wiped his lips with his fingers and replaced the cup and saucer on the trolley. “I’ve got to get going. I’m due in at noontime.”

“Thank you very much, Sam. I much appreciate your help.”

“Nothing to it. A raisin, we might say, in the cake. I owe you my life, don’t forget. What do you think you’ll do now?”

“I’m not a gambling man, but I’m going to go with the best odds. If your friend thinks Mr. White is in the legal profession, I’ll start there. And I assume the best place to find a lawyer is in a court of law.”

Quinn slapped himself on the leg. “The Rossin is not too far from the courthouse. Come by and see me. If you want to splurge and have a meal, make sure you ask for Joseph for your waiter. I’ll tip him off. He owes me a few favours. He’ll keep the cost down.”

“Thank you, Sam. I think what I’ll do is ask Vince Newcombe of the Manchester if he’ll accompany me. He knows what White looks like.”

“That is savvy thinking.” Quinn got to his feet. “Time waits for no man, least of all a baker. No, stay where you are. I’ll let myself out. I’ll just collect the dogs. Don’t worry about Havoc. You’ve got enough on your plate, and it’s not cakes, if you don’t mind my joke. I’ll bring him back when he’s better. You can call on me at any time for consultation if you need to.”

He shook hands heartily and left. Murdoch sat for a moment staring into the fire, watching the flames dip and dance around the coals. He felt as if he was not making progress at all. The information about Pugh and the hired dog didn’t seem relevant. On the other hand, he knew that in any investigation, one of the best ways to proceed was to follow the lies, the way a hound follows spoor. You were bound to end up with some kind of prize.

He stood up, fighting off a feeling of desperation. He didn't have too much to go on. One way or the other, he wanted to know for certain if his father was John Delaney's killer. No, "wanted" was too pallid a word. He *had* to know.

Chapter Thirty-four

THEY WERE ALL GROUPED AROUND Margaret's bedside as if it were her deathbed. She was propped up on her cushions, her eyes closed. Adelia looked at the gaunt face, the distorted hands that were resting on the hot water bottle lying on the quilt. How she wished her father would stop maintaining the fiction that Margaret was an active participant in family affairs. For many years now she had increasingly retreated into a world of her own, driven by unremitting pain and the dependency she had developed on her opiates. She was very different from the pretty, vivacious woman that Adelia remembered from her childhood.

On the bedside table there was a delicate, painted porcelain lamp, which had started to smoke badly. Charles stopped in mid-sentence to stare at it.

"The chimney needs a good wash, Carmel," he said in a mild voice.

"So I see," replied his sister-in-law. She didn't add a complaint about how much work she had to do, but the reproach was clearly there in her voice. She was seated on the other side of the bed, across from Adelia, who avoided looking at her as much as possible. Carmel was Margaret's younger sister by six years. She was inclined to be stout, and her light brown hair was turning mouse grey. Whatever resemblance there may have once been between the sisters was long vanished, except in the colour of their eyes, which were a peculiar green-blue. Adelia thought that her aunt had been complimented far too often on her fine eyes when she was younger because she still frequently and inappropriately cast flirtatious glances at any person in

trousers who came to call. As she was so fond of saying, she could have had her choice of several suitors but had sacrificed the pleasures of matrimony for the duty of family loyalty. When Margaret had become debilitated by severe arthritis when she was less than forty years old, Carmel had come to nurse her and take care of her poor children and husband. She had stayed ever since.

"Perhaps you could take charge of cleaning the lamps, Adelia. It would help lighten your aunt's burden," said Charles.

"No, Brother-in-law, I wouldn't dream of it. My niece has plenty to do, and she is always willing to help me if I ask."

Adelia flushed. It was not true what her aunt said. She hated doing housework and never helped out with a good grace. She preferred to spend her days practising her recitation pieces. Besides, she knew Aunt Carmel was kind only in front of her father.

"Very well, then let us recap the situation and discuss the various choices that are before us," said Charles.

Still stirred by the previous remarks, Adelia spoke with unusual directness. "I thought you told us we had no choices, Papa."

He waved his hand impatiently. He didn't like to be interrupted in his judiciary.

"We'll see, we'll see. Now, James, recount your tale again."

Craig Junior had brought in a dish of oysters and his after-lunch glass of port. He took a gulp before he answered.

"I was in the music room, as Mrs. Delaney insists on calling it, accompanying Miss Kate on my flute when he came in. He said he was with Newcombe and had come to see the dog, but I knew him right away." James looked slightly discomfited. "He was in court at the same time I was. He's not a man you forget easily."

"Oh, James, what trouble you caused us," said Adelia.

Her father held up a warning finger. "Enough has been said on that topic. I believe James learned his lesson."

Adelia's assertiveness disappeared, as short lived as a struck match.

"You are certain this officer didn't recognise you?" asked Carmel.

James hesitated. "I can't be absolutely sure. He acted as if he didn't, but I thought there was something there when he first saw me."

"And you gave no indication yourself?"

James grinned. "Not a wink. Mr. Irving himself could not have done better."

"If he was not passing by innocently as he claims, why was he there?" asked Adelia, her voice low.

"I wish you would speak up, Addie," said her brother with considerable irritation. "We have to strain to hear you all the time. It's most aggravating."

"Adelia's question is most pertinent," interrupted Charles. "In fact, it is *the* question. Why indeed is a policeman paying a visit to the Delaneys at this late date?"

Margaret opened her eyes. "Charles, do we have to move again?"

"I am not sure, dearest. We are discussing the matter at this moment."

She turned her head, wincing at the pain of the movement. "If so, I would like to go where it is warm."

"I know, my sweeting. We will, of course, take that into account."

Craig continued, his voice measured and pensive as if he were contemplating a fine point of philosophy as he had done when he was a student at Oxford.

"The answer to the question is that we do not know at present why he was there. Does he have Newcombe under observation? A trifling matter of keeping a gaming house? Or is it more sinister? Does it involve us?"

"We can't assume that, Papa," said Adelia. "Surely he cannot know. I beg you not to make us move again. I have been preparing for my Christmas recital. I really cannot bear the thought of leaving right now." Her voice was shaky with held back tears, and Craig frowned.

"You must not be selfish, Adelia. There are others to consider. Your mother would benefit from being in a warm climate, Florida perhaps. Moreover, we cannot risk that, in fact, this officer is on our trail. Do you agree, James?"

"I think we must. If it is a false alarm, we can always return."

"Carmel?"

"I suppose so. We really have no choice as I see it."

"Precisely."

Charles leaned over and patted his daughter's arm.

"Don't fret, child. We won't go all at once. That would look very strange. I am suggesting that James and I leave immediately. We will announce that my mother is very ill. Margaret, I'm afraid you will have to stay here until we know how the land lies. But I do promise you at the very least a long holiday in the sun in the new year."

"Thank you," murmured his wife. She appeared to be drifting into sleep.

"You can't go alone," said Carmel. "You are both as helpless as newborn lambs when it comes to looking after yourselves. I will come with you. Adelia is quite accustomed to taking care of her mother."

Craig beamed at his sister-in-law. "How generous of you, Carmel. That would certainly be the best arrangement. Margaret won't have to be disturbed at this time, and Adelia can go to her recital. Is that agreeable with you, child?"

Adelia's hands were clasped tightly in her lap, but she had had too many years of training to reveal what she felt, how resentful she actually was, and underneath that how hurt.

"I'm sorry you won't see me perform," she said.

Craig stood up and bent over her to place a kiss on the top of her head.

"And I know I am speaking for all of us when I say that we, too, are sorry. You must give us a private demonstration."

"Yes, Papa."

"That's settled then. James, will you go down to the railway station at once and make arrangements."

"Yes, Papa."

Adelia looked up at her brother. "And what will you say to poor Kate Delaney? She had already gone into one decline because of you. Will you send her to her grave now?"

James laughed. "Don't be so melodramatic, Addie. I will write her a tender note informing her that my beloved grandmother in America is desperately ill, and I am accompanying my father to her bedside. Shortly, dear grandmother will recover some of her health but be precarious. I will write letters of increasing scarcity, but eventually I will inform Kate that another has won my heart and that will be the end of that."

"No, you won't," said Craig, his voice sharp. "One letter to say we are leaving, and that's it. Letters can be traced."

"Yes, of course. Sorry, Papa."

"How can you be so callous, James?" Adelia burst out. "You break their hearts like a boy smashes robins' eggs just to see what's inside."

"My, my, don't tell me you have become attached to somebody, Leila? Is that really why you are riding me so? Has Mr. Pugh won your heart? He has, I see. Look how she blushes, Papa."

Craig scrutinised his daughter. "Is that the case, Adelia? Is that why you are being so obdurate?"

"No, Papa. I am upset that my brother has developed the morals of a tom cat."

James burst out laughing, rather pleased with her words. "She's fibbing, Papa. She is in an amour with the cheeky Mr. Pugh."

Adelia didn't respond, but her knuckles had turned white with the pressure of her grip.

Craig spoke soothingly. "We really don't have a choice, Adelia. It is not impossible that this officer recognised your brother. What if he pursued the matter? What would happen to your mother if we were ever to be discovered and prosecuted? How could she face years of her beloved husband and son incarcerated? And don't forget, my child, disagreeable as it is to your unlike soul, you also are implicated. You don't want to be in the Mercer, I assume, with women who are of the very foulest kind."

He always used this elaborate language, and Adelia thought it was like gold braid on a filthy coat. She stared at her own thin, pale fingers and hated him with all her heart.

"Very well then. James and I will go on the first train. We will head to Chicago and will send you a telegram to the post office, the usual code."

"Are you going to leave the plates here?" asked Adelia.

"Of course. Given that this policeman might be on to us, it would be most foolish for James or I to carry them with us."

"What if they demand to search the premises?"

"They are well hidden in the usual place and will never be found. In the highly unlikely event that they are, you all will plead complete ignorance. Not a hint; not the slightest deviation. Do I make myself quite clear, Adelia?"

She nodded, sullenly.

"I will send you word when it is safe to move them." "Do we have enough money to live on?" asked Carmel.

"For a while." Craig sipped again on his wine. "But I am thinking it is time one of my children made an advantageous match. A wealthy American heiress, for instance. What do you say to that, James?"

His son shrugged. "All the same to me. As long as she's pretty and not a bore, I'll marry her. The problem is we haven't stayed long enough in any one place for me to court anybody."

"I haven't noticed that to hinder you, James. You seem capable of cementing a friendship with quite amazing rapidity as far as I can tell." He looked over at his daughter. "We won't talk about it now, Adelia, but you must start to consider your duty to your own flesh and blood. You are an attractive girl when you want to be. Next year I want you going out in society much more than you do. As the poet says, why be 'a violet born to blush unseen ... on the desert air'?"

"What about Aunt Carmel?" burst out Adelia. "She's still single. She could marry a rich widower."

"Don't be silly, child. Carmel has long given up such notions. Isn't that so, Sister-in-law?"

"Long ago, Brother Charles. I have no other wish but to tend to my sister and her children until the time I am no longer needed."

The lie sat in the air, thick and cloying as the smoke from the oil lamp. Adelia felt as if she was choking.

Chapter Thirty-five

ALMOST AT A TROT , Murdoch headed over to Church Street where he could catch a northbound streetcar. He was also anxious to talk to young Billy. The lad was at the same spot, and when he saw Murdoch he called out.

"More letters for me, Mister?"

"No. I just want to make sure you delivered the one I gave you."

"I did. No gammon. I did exactly what you asked." He grinned cheekily. "If I told you how she was, will you give me another nickel?"

"Maybe. Depends if it's worth it. But the truth only. No fibbing. Was she pleased?"

"She was and she wasn't. When I said the letter was from you, she looked alarmed. You know, as if you was going to write something bad that she didn't want to hear. Then she stood there and read it and she looked happy; then she looked sad again."

Billy was suiting his facial expressions to his words so that the contortions made Murdoch laugh even though he didn't like it that Enid had looked sad.

"Did she say anything?"

"She thanked me kindly for bringing the letter. She talks in a funny way, doesn't she? Like she's singing. 'Thank you, young man. I am obliged to you.'" He gave such a perfect imitation of Enid's Welsh accent that Murdoch laughed again.

"Hey, mind your manners, fellow."

The arab was studying him shrewdly. "I should tell you, Mr. Murdoch, you've got a rival, a masher."

"What are you talking about?"

"'S true. He must have seen you give me the note. I hardly got round the corner there when he was on me. He offered me twenty-five cents if I'd tell him who you were."

"And did you?"

"Not me. 'Why do you want to know?' I asks." He squinted up at Murdoch. "Shall I tell you what he says?"

"You'd better!"

"All right, you don't need to blow. He says, 'Because I have reason to believe that man is of a suspicious character, and if you are carrying a letter for him it could get you in trouble with the law.'"

"What! Who the hell was this fellow?"

"I told you, he's trying to shove you out with your lady. That was just guff he was giving me about suspicious character."

Murdoch frowned. "Did you tell him my name?"

"'Course I did. I says, 'You've got it all wrong, Mister. He's the law himself. He's a Detective, name of Murdoch.'"

The boy was grinning at Murdoch triumphantly.

"Get on with it, Billy, for the Lord's sake."

"That stops him right in his tracks. 'Can I have a peek at the note?' he asks, which was when I knew he was trying to move in on your lady. 'Not a chance,' says me. 'This is private for her eyes only.' 'Very well,' he says, 'I am mistook in my suspicions,' and off he goes."

Murdoch stared at the boy, who immediately shifted his glance.

"You're a little liar. You showed him the letter, didn't you?"

Billy flinched away from the raised hand. "No, I didn't. I swear, Mister."

Murdoch stepped back, ashamed of his sudden temper.

"Can you describe him to me?"

"He wasn't anything special. Not as tall as you. Brown moustache. He had on one of those waterproofs with a cape. He wasn't no swell, but he didn't look hard up either.

Spoke sort of soft." The boy regarded Murdoch anxiously. "That's all I noticed, honest."

"You were probably staring at his money, that's why."

Billy flushed and once again, Murdoch felt ashamed of himself. He cuffed the boy lightly on his arm.

"It's all right. I'd be the same if I was in your shoes."

"I just remembered something," Billy said. "He took off his glove to pay me, and he had the top of his finger missing. This one."

He held up the middle finger of his left hand. Murdoch stared at the boy.

"You're not having me on, are you?"

"No, sir. I swear that's what I saw. This finger."

"All right, I believe you. If he comes and talks to you again, let me know at once. You can come to the station. They'll take down a message. Don't look so nervous. If you've got a clean conscience, nothing will happen to you." Murdoch fished another couple of pennies out of his pocket. "Here. Add that to your haul."

At that moment a carriage stopped at the kerb, and an elderly man leaned out of the window, snapping his fingers at the lad to clear a path to the hotel door.

"Yes, sir. Here we go."

Billy jumped to the command, and Murdoch left him to it and continued on his way. Unless there had been an epidemic of amputations of middle fingers in the city, he assumed this man was the same one who had negotiated hiring Gargoyle for Mr. Pugh. Sam Quinn must have let it leak out why he was inquiring. Trying to stop gossip among the Fancy was as impossible as trying to stop fleas hopping from dog to dog.

He wondered how the man had tracked him down. It was also embarrassing to think of another man reading his tenderest thoughts, but there was little doubt the boy had shown him the letter. How could he resist such an offer when it meant a night's lodging to him? On the other hand,

maybe it was strictly a coincidence about the dogs, and this man was truly a rival. As far as he knew, Enid had had no callers all the while she lived at the Kitchens', and it seemed unlikely. So either the "bland as blancmange" stranger was interested in knowing about Murdoch because he was Enid's suitor or because he was investigating the Delaney case. Both possibilities troubled him.

Chapter Thirty-six

THE COURTHOUSE FOYER was full of hazy blue smoke as many of the spectators were taking advantage of an adjournment to have a pipe or cigar.

"Let's look at the notice board," said Newcombe, and he forged a path through the crowd to one of the massive concrete pillars in the centre of the foyer where the boards were fixed. In spite of his attempt to honour the gravity of the situation, the innkeeper was enjoying himself. He had accepted Murdoch's invitation with alacrity, declaring it was not often he got to go down to the city.

"There's a case in courtroom A, which is that one to the right. We might as well start there."

They shoved through the mass of people and went into the courtroom.

"Over here. There's space in the third row, next to the prisoner's box."

Murdoch followed close behind, and they slid into the bench. Murdoch looked around. The room could not in any way be termed majestic with its unadorned walls and plain wooden benches. The best feature was the tall windows that faced onto Adelaide Street on the north side and Toronto Street on the west. There was a new electric light hanging from the ceiling, but it was pale against the sunlight that was coming through the windows. The winter sun was putting in an appearance.

"Oi, them's our seats," boomed somebody behind them. Two men, one of them big and wide-shouldered, were glaring at them. Newcombe was not in the least intimidated. "Finders keepers," he said, cheerily. The man who had the

weather-beaten face of a teamster looked as if he was about to make an issue of it, but fortunately, at that moment a woman on the end of the row stood up and relinquished her place.

"You can sit here. I'm leaving."

"You haven't heard the verdict yet," said another spectator.

She shrugged. "He'll get off. They always do."

With a little angry swish of her skirts, she left.

"Anybody want to take odds on it? Two to one, Not Guilty," said one of the men, a sharp-nosed fellow who looked as if he'd make a wager on his own mother's death hour if somebody would take him up on it.

"Done," said another man in front of him. There were no other takers, but a lot of reluctant shuffling as the row made room for the large man who had challenged Newcombe.

Murdoch was squashed between a stout, rosy-cheeked woman on his left and Newcombe on his right. The woman's hat was so wide it was virtually brushing his cheek, and he felt sorry for the man seated behind her who, he could see, was bobbing back and forth to peer around her.

Murdoch had appeared as a witness on a few occasions in the court; and because he knew there was a risk of being recognised, he'd taken the precaution of wearing his brown fedora instead of his Astrakhan cap, and he had it pulled well down over his forehead. His muffler was up around his cheeks. He knew that many of the spectators were regular visitors, especially if the case was sensational, as he gathered this one was. All around him was the same air of anticipation and excitement you'd find at a music hall show just before the curtain went up. Nobody dared spit or break open nuts because of the court constable observing them, but they would have if they could.

Murdoch pulled off his gloves and wiped his forehead under the brim of his hat. He was already sweating. The courtroom was heated by a large woodstove, and with so

many people in their winter clothes, all jammed together, it was stifling. He wasn't sure he could maintain his cover much longer.

Newcombe nudged him. "We're starting," he said.

The door at the far end of the room opened, and the clerk of the court entered, a tiny, bespectacled man in sombre black. A tall, shambling sort of man in the black suit and white collar and tie of a barrister followed him.

"My, oh, my," exclaimed Newcombe. "Look who it isn't." He nodded in the direction of the lawyer. "It's Mr. Clement himself. He was Harry Murdoch's counsel."

Murdoch's heart thumped, and he stretched to get a better look at the man. Harry had spoken of him with some contempt, and Murdoch could understand why. Clement's appearance was not impressive. He was beardless but his side whiskers were long and wispy, and the hair that was dragged across the crown of his head in a futile attempt to hide his baldness was greasy. His black gown didn't fit him well, as if it were on loan from a shorter man. He took his seat at the lawyers' table, which faced the jury section, and began to riffle through the papers.

Unobtrusively, a man came down the centre aisle from the back of the courtroom and stepped into the prisoner's box, which was next to them. Murdoch assumed this was the accused in the case. He must have been granted bail and was therefore under his own recognisance to show up for his trial. He was a trim-looking man, well-dressed in a dark grey morning suit and sober cravat. In contrast to his counsel, his hair and beard were neat. He was close enough for Murdoch to get a whiff of his pomade.

The stout woman prodded Murdoch in the ribs with her elbow. "That's the complainer. The woman in the brown cape."

She indicated the bench behind Mr. Clement. The woman was clearly under a strain, fiddling with her hair, repetitiously tucking strands up beneath her wide-brimmed

hat. It was rather hard to place her, not quite respectable with a too lavishly beribboned hat, but her clothes were decent enough.

The door facing them opened yet again and in strode two more barristers. Newcombe thumped Murdoch in his excitement.

"Bull's-eye, first time out. It's him. The one in front. It's our man White."

The teamster heard this of course, and he snorted with the contempt of those in the know for the ignorant.

"No, it's not. That's Mr. Blackstock. He's the junior defending counsel."

Murdoch glanced at Newcombe for confirmation, and the innkeeper nodded. "That's the one we want all right. No matter what he's calling himself, there's no mistake." The men were seated at the same table.

"Are he and Clement partners then?"

The teamster answered for Newcombe. "Yes they are, although Mr. Blackstock senior is the one who does most of the questioning. Sharp as a tack he is. Clement seems half asleep."

Newcombe shook his head. "Very strange. There wasn't a whisker to be seen of Mr. Blackstock cum White at the trial."

"What trial are you talking about?" interrupted his neighbour. "I've seen most of them. I can't work because I hurt my back. I come here whenever I can; gives me something to do."

Murdoch thought he'd throw some bread on the water and see where it floated.

"Did you see the case of *Regina v. Henry Murdoch*? He was charged with the murder of John Delaney up in the Shaftesbury Road ravine this past August. Mr. Clement was his defence counsel."

"Murdoch? Is he a tall scrawny fellow, no hair on his head to speak of? Glum looking?"

"Yes, I suppose that would describe him," said Murdoch.

"I did watch that case." He stared at the innkeeper. "Hey, now that I take a closer gander at you, you were one of the witnesses. You're a publican." He tapped the side of his nose with his forefinger. "I never forget a face."

"Yes, that's me, Vincent Newcombe. And who are you?"

"George Rogerson, at your service. And who's your friend?"

"Williams," answered Murdoch.

"Have we met before? You look familiar as well. Were you a witness?"

"No, I don't think we've met. I hear that all the time. I must have a common sort of mug."

They shook hands all round.

"Why were you asking after the Murdoch case?"

"Just curious. I understand there was doubt as to whether he was guilty or not."

Rogerson shrugged. "Don't know where you get that from. Open and shut. I prefer a case that's got a bit of drama to it. You know, is this poor man wrongfully accused? Yes he is, no he isn't, well make up your mind because there's a rope necklace to be fitted. But that fellow was a goner from the start. Got himself drunk as a lord then bashed the man he thought had cheated him. Mark my words, it happens all the time. He should have pleaded manslaughter. He'd have got a lighter sentence."

Murdoch felt an unreasonable desire to knock the knowing look off Mr. Rogerson's face.

"Did Mr. Clement do a good job, would you say?"

"Not bad considering he didn't have much to work with. But the prosecutor was better. A Mr. Greene. He'll go far, that young man. Hungry as a shark for advancement. And jurors respect him. Don't talk down to them or get too familiar. Mr. Clement mumbles, which in my opinion is bad for a barrister. Makes you think he doesn't know what he's talking about."

Mr. Blackstock alias White was at the prisoner's box talking to his client. He was medium height, young to be a barrister, with dark, full hair and a luxuriant moustache. He ignored the spectators as if they didn't exist, shook hands with the defendant, and sat down beside Mr. Clement. Murdoch knew Newcombe was not mistaken. Blackstock fitted the description Harry had given him. He could not mask his own air of confidence and privilege. He was a swell, there was no doubt about it.

Suddenly, responding to some signal Murdoch could not detect, the clerk of the court picked up a bell from the table and rang it with vigour.

"Oyez, oyez, oyez. All rise. The court is now in session, His Honour, Mr. Justice Falconbridge, presiding."

With much shuffling, the spectators got to their feet as in swept the judge, an imposing figure in his long, black robe. He mounted the steps to the judge's bench, which was on a raised platform. Here he paused, surveyed the courtroom, nodded, and sat down.

The clerk called out. "You may be seated."

More shuffling as everybody sat down; Murdoch was squashed even more against his neighbour as the spectators on his bench seized their opportunity to make more room for themselves. The judge indicated to the clerk that he could call the jury, and they soon filed in, thirteen men. All of them were neatly turned out, and Murdoch surmised they were predominantly merchants, one or two might even have been professional men. The counsel for the defence had done well by himself with this jury. They took their places in the jury section, which was on Falconbridge's left-hand side at right angles to the spectators.

The clerk had the commanding manner of the officious. "Foreman of the jury, please stand. Have you collectively reached a verdict?"

"We have."

“And will you therefore speak for your fellow jurors. What is that verdict? Do you find the accused guilty or not guilty of the crime of rape?”

The foreman smiled. “We find the accused to be not guilty.”

There was an outburst of chatter in the court, which the judge immediately suppressed by hammering with his gavel. From the noise, however, Murdoch assumed this was a popular verdict. The man in the prisoner’s box actually gave a little wave of his hand in acknowledgement. However, Murdoch saw how the woman responded as if she had been slapped. Then she stood up slowly. There was a man in the first row of onlookers, and he came forward and took her arm. He did not comfort her, nor did she ask for comfort. She looked over at her own barrister, who said something to her then turned back to gather up his papers. She began to walk down the aisle toward the rear doors. Murdoch had the impression that if it was not a court of law, many of the men watching would have been jeering and shouting at her.

“What was she charging him with?” he asked Rogerson.

“Carnal knowledge. He’s a doctor and she says he fiddled with her when she was being examined.”

“And?”

The man tugged at the ends of his moustache. “Mebbe he did, but why’s she bringing it out in public I want to know? If she was my wife, I wouldn’t countenance it. Disgrace to the family. And look what happened. He got off. You can’t charge a doctor and expect it to stick. She was worse than foolish to even try.”

There was quite a crowd around the doctor congratulating him, but Murdoch saw the younger Blackstock was walking towards the rear door.

“Come on, Vincent, let’s go and have a word with Mr. White.”

“I told you, his name’s Blackstock,” said their neighbour.

Chapter Thirty-seven

MURDOCH WASN'T SURE HOW he was going to be granted access to Blackstock without admitting to the court clerk, and therefore to Newcombe, who he really was. Fortunately, a well-wisher was delaying the barrister in the courtroom, and by ruthlessly shoving through the crowd Murdoch was able to get close, Newcombe right behind him.

"Mr. Blackstock, a word if you please."

The young man halted. He looked at Murdoch politely enough, ready for more congratulations, but then he saw Newcombe and an expression of utter alarm flitted across his face. Murdoch seized his chance and stuck out his hand.

"My name is Williams." He nodded over his shoulder. "I believe you already know Mr. Newcombe. I wondered if we could have a word in private."

Blackstock returned his handshake reluctantly and gave Newcombe a brief acknowledgement. The transparency of his thoughts was almost laughable. He was considering denying all knowledge of the innkeeper, refusing an audience to them, and vanishing into his chambers. This was swiftly followed by the realisation that Newcombe must know who he was and was seeking him out for a reason. Not a benign reason, if his nervousness was any indication.

"Yes, of course. Come this way to my chambers. Thank you, sir. Thank you very much."

This last remark was to one more well-wisher. They were acting as if the Blackstocks had won a championship of some kind instead of the dubious victory of prejudice over truth. Murdoch was happy to follow him through the door into the calm of the adjoining hall.

"I'm in here," he said, indicating the door to the right. They followed him into the room.

Mr. Clement either had a different chamber or was still being detained in the courtroom because, to Murdoch's relief, he wasn't present. Like the courtroom itself, the chamber was plain. No fancy panelling or lush curtains here. The floor was planked, the fireplace small and meagre, and the window was covered with a beige Holland blind. A single table sat in the corner, and a weather-beaten bookcase, crammed with papers, was beside the door. There were two armchairs, both in worse condition than the one Murdoch had in his own cubicle at the station.

Blackstock took refuge behind the table, waving at them to sit down. He opened a wooden box and took out a cigar. As an afterthought, he offered the box to the two men.

"No, thank you," said Murdoch, but Newcombe accepted eagerly.

"What can I do for you, Mr., er, Williams?" He didn't look at Murdoch but busied himself with the ritual of clipping his cigar and lighting it. Newcombe did the same, and the air quickly filled with aromatic smoke.

"I understand you were present at a ratting match after which one of the participants, John Delaney, was found dead in the creek."

"Oh, you do so understand, do you? And who told you that?" Even now he could not totally forsake his barrister's attitudes.

"I did, sir," interjected Newcombe. "We came here to find a Mr. White, and we found a Mr. Blackstock. But you are one and the same, unless you perchance have a double."

He chuckled and Blackstock smiled nervously. "No, not that I know of."

Suddenly, he pulled out a red silk handkerchief from his inner pocket and wiped his forehead. "As you see, I am one and the same."

“Why did you not come forward, sir?” asked Murdoch. “The police put out advertisements for you. A man was charged with the murder.”

“Right. As a matter of fact I never saw any such advertisements. I did read about the murder, shocking thing that, but the murderer was apprehended immediately so I saw no reason why I would be needed.”

“It was a criminal case, Mr. Blackstock.”

“I do realise that, but as I say, it seemed no concern of mine.”

Again there was the hurried mopping of the forehead, and Murdoch saw it was no mere ritual. Blackstock was sweating profusely. Suddenly he seemed to realise what Murdoch was doing, and he scowled. “Why are you here? By what authority do you ask me such questions?”

Murdoch hesitated but Newcombe gave him a reprieve. “Mr. Williams has been hired by the family of the accused man to do a further investigation – to make absolutely certain that justice has been served.”

“What are you talking about? There wasn’t a shadow of a doubt. I, myself, saw the bad feelings between Harry Murdoch and John Delaney.”

Murdoch interjected. “You’re a man of the law, Mr. Blackstock, yet you deliberately ignore a plea for your witness in a murder case. I find that reprehensible.”

“I told you, I didn’t know anything about it.”

“And yet your own partner was the defending counsel. According to Harry Murdoch, he offered to take on the case, pro bono. I should say that normally you would only take a case that pays well, like the doctor today. Why did you agree to defend somebody who had no money at all?”

“Clement and I don’t discuss everything. We work independently. If he wants to work for charity, it’s up to him.”

Blackstock was sitting very still staring at Murdoch, a lamb watching the wolf circling.

"Isn't it more likely that you instructed him to take the case so you could keep close tabs on what was happening? Clement is not a particularly good lawyer. Is that why you had him take the case? So that the accused man would *not* get off?"

Blackstock pushed his chair away from the desk, as far from Murdoch as he could.

"That is preposterous. I really do insist you leave, sir. This entire harangue is an insult."

"An insult doesn't measure up to the damage of a hanging, Mr. Blackstock. You can feel as indignant as you want, but you are not the one who will be dead before the week is out, insulted or not."

Murdoch could feel his own anger was barely in check. He'd actually spat, and there was a glistening dot of spittle on Blackstock's chin. Newcombe intervened.

"Gentlemen, I think we need to discuss this matter more calmly. Perhaps Mr. White, I mean, Mr. Blackstock, knowing the gravity and urgency of the matter, would be willing to make a statement, in confidence as it were."

Perhaps because he saw the innkeeper as his inferior, Blackstock managed to find some dignity again. He wiped his chin.

"I repeat, I have nothing to add that would at all change the verdict of the case."

"Unless it was a confession," said Murdoch.

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Exactly that. You yourself could easily have murdered Delaney."

"What utter nonsense." Blackstock picked up a silver bell that was on his desk. "I'm not going to listen to this. I shall have you removed at once, sir."

Before he could shake the bell, if that was really his intention, Murdoch leaned over and grabbed his hand.

"We haven't finished our conversation to my satisfaction."

"Are you threatening me, sir?"

"If you like. And I will go further if necessary. Mr. Newcombe, will you lock the door, please?"

Although he looked uneasy at this turn of events, the innkeeper obeyed and remained by the door. Murdoch released Blackstock's wrist.

"All I require are the answers to some simple questions. If you have a clean conscience, you need have no fear."

"Of course I have a clean conscience. Why shouldn't I?"

"Why indeed? Now then. I understand you left the tavern at the same time as Mr. Craig and his son?"

"Yes. And they have confirmed that under oath."

"They merely stated that they went into their house and left you apparently walking towards Yonge Street. However, it would have been easy for you to turn back and go into the ravine. You weren't that far behind Delaney. What's to say you didn't catch up with him? There's nothing easier than to get hot about a cheater when there are high stakes. You challenge him, you lose your temper, and as he turns away from you, you hit him with a piece of wood. He falls to the ground. You get out of there as fast as you can. And wait to see if somebody else will take the blame."

Blackstock gaped at Murdoch. "Are you insane? I did no such thing."

"It's not that far-fetched; don't pretend it is. You are a respectable professional man, but you're also a gambler. You were drinking that afternoon. Perhaps your judgement was affected. Maybe you didn't even realise Delaney was dead when you fled."

"Don't be ridiculous."

Murdoch picked up the bell. "Would you like to come forward and make a statement?"

"There is no point. The case is closed. As far as I am concerned, the guilty party has been apprehended. Any testimony I could have made would not have affected the verdict at all."

Murdoch stared into Blackstock's eyes. He believed him. The other man sensed his change of attitude and relaxed a little.

He got up and went to a cupboard underneath the window behind him. "Excuse me, gentlemen. I have to take a tonic for my health."

He poured himself a full glass from the bottle, and gulped it back. Dabbing at his mouth, he returned to his chair.

"You say you are conducting an investigation on behalf of the family of the convicted man?"

"That's right."

"You must be working for Murdoch's son then. He listed one daughter, who is in a convent, and a son, who was last known to be a lumberjack."

Murdoch fenced the question. "So you admit to being conversant with the case?"

There was silence for a moment, and he saw the conflict on the barrister's face. Blackstock mopped up again. "To tell you the truth, I wouldn't mind making a clean breast of the whole thing."

Murdoch sat back in his chair. "Please do."

"When I read about the murder and the detaining of the Murdoch man, I thought the least I could do was to ensure he had a fair trial. No, wait, sir. It is not at all what you were imputing just now. I did not want it known to the public that I had been present at your establishment, Mr. Newcombe, but that is the extent of my prevarications. I suggested to Clement to take on the case. He is not a showy fellow, but contrary to what you believe, he is competent. I assisted him to the best of my ability when he needed it. However, I have to assure you, Mr. Williams, it was not complicated. I don't think it would have mattered very much who represented Mr. Murdoch."

Blackstock picked up a frame photograph from his desk and held it out to Murdoch.

“I do realise I must seem like a shabby sort of chap, but I have more than just myself to consider. That beautiful woman is my wife, Emmeline. The little infant is my son, Algernon the third.”

Murdoch took the picture. It was a studio portrait. An impeccable Blackstock was standing beside his wife, who was seated, an infant in christening robes and bonnet in her arms. She was very young, perhaps not more than twenty, with fair hair, elaborately coiffed, and she was elegantly and fashionably dressed.

“As you can imagine, Mr. Williams, I ...”

He didn’t get a chance to finish his sentence. There was a sharp knock on the door.

“Algie, open up.”

Newcombe unlocked the door, and Emmeline Blackstock herself swept in.

“Why have you got the door locked, Algie?” She stopped when she saw her husband’s visitors, but Murdoch thought it was a calculated hesitation, a brief concession to social etiquette. “I beg your pardon, I didn’t realise you were busy.”

Blackstock hurried over to her and took her hand. “We’ll be finished in a moment, dearest. I’ll join you in the carriage.”

But the lovely Mrs. Blackstock was not going to be fobbed off so easily. She knew who was important and who wasn’t. “Little Nonny is wailing like a banshee. He so wants to see his poppa.”

She turned to bestow a pretty smile on Murdoch. He could see Newcombe was ready to bolt out of the door, but something about Madame Emmeline infuriated him. She could not be considered an exceptionally pretty woman, but he had never before seen anyone so gorgeously dressed. Lush ostrich feathers bobbed at the crown of her pert hat, and her walking suit was a soft golden velvet with a trimming of dark fur at the hem and waist. There was an

insert at the bosom of ivory-coloured leather, which looked as if it was sewn with small precious stones. That piece of apparel alone would have cost more than Murdoch earned in three months, and that was a conservative estimate.

"I'm afraid Nonny will have to cry a little longer, madam," he said. "Our business is not yet concluded."

One might have thought from her shocked expression that he had suddenly started to unbutton his trousers. Blackstock, on the other hand, suddenly reacted like a cornered fox. He positively jumped into action.

"Mr. Williams is quite right, my dearest. Please wait for me in the carriage, and I will be there momentarily."

He was almost shoving her out of the room, and in the upheaval she dropped the dainty fur muff she was carrying. Murdoch picked it up and handed it to her. She looked into his eyes for a moment. Whatever she saw there seemed to alarm her, and she made no more resistance. Blackstock closed the door behind her and pulled out his handkerchief. At first Murdoch didn't realise that it was not only sweat Blackstock was wiping away, but also his tears. He glanced over at Newcombe, who gave a little shrug of embarrassment. However, Murdoch wanted Blackstock to squirm some more so he said nothing else, just sat waiting for him to recover his composure.

"You were saying, sir? As I can imagine ..."

"I, er, well, you saw her ..."

"I saw that your wife is accustomed to luxury. I assume she would not approve of any habits that would jeopardise her style of life. Is that what you wanted to say?"

"Yes," whispered Blackstock.

Chapter Thirty-eight

FR. LE BEL CLUTCHED AT HIS WIDE-BRIMMED HAT , which was in danger of sailing off his head in the gusting wind. He regretted now that he hadn't caught a streetcar along King Street, but he practised little economies whenever he could. His parish was small and not a wealthy one, consisting largely of French Canadian tanners who had formed a community in the vicinity of the church. They didn't even have their own building yet but were using the former Methodist Church that was on that spot and which had been abandoned for the more splendid cathedral on Church Street. This never ceased to disturb Fr. LeBel, who said to anybody who would listen he felt like a cuckoo, who he understood were too lazy to build their own nests but simply borrowed those of other birds to lay their eggs. His congregation listened to his homilies on this subject with impassivity. They were struggling *mettre le pain sur la table* , and for the moment they were content to worship in the old church, especially as the bishop had come down from Montreal to bless the site.

After putting in a brief appearance, the sun had retreated and the afternoon had turned grey and cold. There were fewer pedestrians than usual. Nobody was out for a stroll the way they were when the weather permitted, admiring the shop windows of the fancy stores that lined the lower end of King Street. However, there were two or three carriages waiting on the street. Fr. LeBel frowned in disapproval. The horses were glossy and well fed, but they stamped and blew air from their nostrils that was white as smoke. In his opinion it was far too cold to keep the poor beasts standing still like that while their mistresses were

pampered and fawned over by sales clerks. The coachmen were muffled from top to toe with heavy fur coverings, but it was the horses he pitied. He decided to make it the point of his homily this Sunday, even though there was not one of his parishioners wealthy enough to keep a horse and carriage. He could extrapolate into the sin of vanity he supposed, although he had dealt with that recently.

As he approached the corner of Church Street, he had to wait for a moment, clutching his hat with one hand and trying to pull his cloak tighter to his body with the other. The wind bit at him savagely. On his right was St. James Cathedral, its soaring copper spire dulled in the gloom. Fr. LeBel said a brief prayer for the souls of the unbaptised who worshipped there. This church disturbed him with what he considered its flagrant imitation of a Roman Catholic edifice. The devil often took a pleasing shape to tempt the faithful into sin. He hurried on.

Every two or three days, it was his task to go to the general post office on Toronto Street to collect mail. Many of the people of the parish used his church as an address because it was easy for their relatives to remember. Also, they didn't have to worry about losing precious letters or parcels at the lodging houses where so many of them lived.

The priest had his head bent so low, he couldn't see where he was going, and suddenly he almost collided with a woman who was coming out of one of the shops. She had a long, silver fur stole wrapped around her face, the little fox head sitting on her shoulder.

"Pardonnez moi, madame," he said, but he was not oblivious to her expression of dismay. With his long, black cloak and wide-brimmed hat he knew, as far as she was concerned, he was a bizarre figure.

The shop from which she had emerged was known as the Golden Lion. Beautiful tall glass windows faced onto King Street, and above the arch of the doorway was a crouching lion cast in brass. Two floors were above that and on top of

the pediment was another huge lion striding confidently into air. It was gilded and in summer the sun burnished it like gold. Fr. LeBel could not understand why a lion should be chosen as a symbol for a dry goods store, and he didn't approve of this either. However, the height of the upper lion meant it could be seen from afar, and it drew many customers. Visitors to the city were usually taken to the store so this magnificent example of Toronto affluence could be boasted about.

He continued on his way with the uncomfortable awareness that the woman with whom he had almost collided had pulled the fur close around her chin as if to protect herself against a pestilence. Fr. LeBel said another prayer to protect himself from the malevolent thoughts of those outside the true faith.

He turned north on Toronto Street heading toward the post office, which was at the end of the street. In spite of the cold journey, the priest enjoyed collecting the mail. The post office never failed to remind him of his Parisian birthplace with its tall, paired columns, recessed windows, and ecclesiastical dome. The fine stone carving over the lintel was the English Royal Arms, so he avoided looking at that. To the left was a wide canopy shading a side door. When he had first arrived in Toronto a year ago, he had inadvertently entered by that door only to find it was intended for the ladies and opened onto a private room where they would not be disturbed. Amidst smiles tinged with contempt he had withdrawn hastily, gathering his soutane in his hand to lift the skirt above the mud.

Today he went in the main entrance, glad to be in the warmth. He hurried over to the wicket, where a postal worker sat waiting for customers. The priest was relieved to see it was Mr. Langley on duty, a man he knew.

"I would like to 'ave the poste for the church, if you please," he said, careful to pronounce his words clearly so as not to give offence.

The other man checked one of the cubby holes behind him. "You have a package today, Father, from Montreal."

Fr. LeBel accepted the small number of letters and signed the chit.

"Somebody will be happy," said Mr. Langley.

Chapter Thirty-nine

QUINN'S FRIEND JOSEPH TURNED OUT TO BE A TALL , straight-backed waiter with the gravity of an undertaker. He was dressed in a black jacket with a neat white bow tie and black trousers. Murdoch took him to one side and, out of Newcombe's hearing, explained who he was. The waiter nodded.

"I've been expecting you, sir. I will do the best I can."

He led them to a table by the window and pulled out a chair for Murdoch to sit, then walked around and did the same for Newcombe. Then, with an almost inaudible murmur of "I will bring menus," he sidled off and disappeared behind the protecting screens at the far end of the room.

"The man could pass for a lawyer if he took off his apron," said Murdoch. The innkeeper grinned at that and relaxed a little.

Murdoch had overridden Newcombe's protests and insisted on taking him to the Rossin House Hotel, which was at the corner of York Street and King.

"It'll cost a week's wages," said Vince.

"I don't care. Let's see how the swells live for once. My money's as good as theirs. Besides, I've been promised a discount. It should only be three days' wages."

Reluctantly, Newcombe complied, but added a sly comment about always wanting to taste the pork cutlets he'd heard about to see if they were as good as Maria's roast pig.

At the moment Murdoch was having to battle his own discomfort. The Rossin House Hotel was one of the finest the city had to offer. The dining room was long and full of

light from the tall windows along one wall. Cleverly, the opposite wall was hung with equally tall mirrors, which doubled the feeling of size and brightness. The polished oak floor gleamed in the gaslight. Murdoch glanced over at the mirror and grimaced. They had been relieved of hats and coats at the door, but his brown suit looked old and he knew there was a stain on his collar by the chin. Newcombe, however, had dressed in his best clothes for his trip to the city; and although he would never have been mistaken for a swell, he was respectable in a navy suit and striped silk four-in-hand.

"This is the most nobby place I've been in," Vince whispered, as if they were in church.

Murdoch looked around. Underneath each mirror was a marble shelf on which stood a blue Chinese vase filled with rushes. Each table was covered with a white damask cloth, and the cruet set looked as if it was solid silver. The dining room was quite full, the soft murmur of voices interwoven with the sound of a small string quartet. He had no idea where the musicians were. Perhaps behind the screen.

I'm going to bring Enid here, he thought to himself, although he suspected she would be even harder to persuade than Vincent had been.

Joseph returned carrying what seemed to be municipal declarations, leather bound with a tasselled marker of gold silk. He opened each one and handed it to Murdoch and Newcombe, respectively. Then discreetly he disappeared.

Newcombe stared at the menu. "Are we expected to eat all this?"

"I don't think so. We can choose what we want from each section."

The first course was SOUP AND FISH .

"I like fish. I think I'll have the mock turtle soup to start off with."

Newcombe laughed. "It's not made from fish stock. Heaven knows why it's called mock turtle. It's made from stewed calf's head. Can be tasty if it's done properly."

"Hmm. In that case I'll go for the salmon trout and oyster sauce."

Newcombe chose the same. Next listed was BOILED AND ROAST followed by ENTREES . Murdoch settled for the leg of mutton with caper sauce, and Newcombe took the corned beef and cabbage. Unfortunately, to his disappointment, pork wasn't offered, and they each decided on fillet of venison larded with wine sauce.

"I'm starting to feel like a lord of the manor," whispered Newcombe. "I'm going to throw the bones to the peasants."

"To the peasants!" exclaimed Murdoch.

They both laughed, incurring the curious glances of a man and woman who were seated nearby. Murdoch had read that the Rossin House Hotel was frequented by the wealthier class of American tourists. Well then, they were now having an opportunity to observe two of the poorer class of natives.

"Come on, Vince. We haven't got halfway through yet. What ornamental do you want?"

"I don't know. What's buffalo tongue *décoré au verdure*?"

"Tongue that's gone mouldy, but they're fancying it up. You'd better take the game pie à la surprise."

"I hope it's a pleasant surprise."

Joseph returned.

"May I recommend the wild turkey with parsnips and boiled potatoes?"

"You may and we accept," said Murdoch, and he relayed their other choices. Joseph collected the menus and went off again.

"I was hoping I could keep mine," said Newcombe. "I wanted to show it to Maria."

Murdoch expected they would have to wait for a long time for the meal, but that was not the case. Joseph soon came

back carrying a large tray, which he set on a carved wooden table against the wall. Then he leaned over Murdoch and removed the heavy damask table napkin from the water goblet where it had been elegantly folded. With a movement worthy of a matador, he draped it across Murdoch's knees. He was about to go around the table and do the same for Newcombe, but the innkeeper forestalled him and snatched the napkin from the glass and dropped it in his lap. Murdoch hid his grin.

The trout was cooked perfectly, flaking away to the touch. They both ate it quickly.

Joseph must have had a spy hole in that rear screen because Murdoch had hardly put down his fork when the man was at his side. He put fresh plates in front of them.

"Fillet of venison," he murmured reverentially.

They tucked in, but this course was not as delicious.

"Needs onions, that's the problem," said Newcombe.

"Those damn peasants must have been chasing it too long. It's tough," added Murdoch.

The entire meal must have lasted close to an hour. By an unspoken but mutual agreement, they didn't talk about the meeting with Blackstock. They needed more privacy and the waiter was never too far away. They ate their way through to the turkey and parsnips ...

At this point Newcombe discreetly undid the buttons of his waistcoat.

"I don't think I can eat another morsel," he said to Murdoch.

"You've got to. The entire meal comes with puddings and pastry, and my friend would never forgive me if I didn't sample one of his cakes."

At that moment the waiter returned wheeling a trolley on which was an exotic selection of sweets. Boiled tapioca with wine sauce; lemon cream pie, Christmas plum pudding with brandy sauce, and three varieties of fruit tarts.

Murdoch chose the raspberry tart, which was the lightest one he could see. Newcombe decided he had to taste the Christmas pudding as Maria's was the best in the county and he wanted to be able to tell her so.

"The problem is that after this I'm going to want to have a cigar," he said to Murdoch.

The waiter overheard. "We do have a gentlemen's smoking room just off the dining hall, sir. I would be more than happy to bring you a cigar and a dark sherry if you desire."

Murdoch knew the man's deference was purchased, but the waiter was far too well trained to show any signs of discrimination at what were so obviously less-than-affluent customers. And there was a glint of selfirony that he liked, well hidden as it was.

"Shall we go and be gentlemen, Newcombe?"

"Indeed."

Slightly staggering, they followed the waiter out of the dining hall. Murdoch noticed many pairs of eyes followed them, several women in wide, bedecked hats and expensive-looking walking suits were dining together. No men in sight, so he assumed it was some kind of delegation.

The smoking lounge was empty, and they were able to take armchairs by the fire. As promised their waiter brought them a box of choice Cuban cigars, assisted them to snip and light up, then withdrew.

Murdoch waited until they had luxuriously savoured the fragrant smoke.

"I was wondering what you thought of Blackstock's story," he asked.

"To tell the truth it was much as I expected. The man was scared witless that he'd be found out for a gambler. I suppose he could have turned back and followed Delaney, but I don't think he did."

Murdoch agreed. It was hard to believe that the loss of a few wagers would provoke Blackstock to murder. Men of his

type let money run through their fingers like fine sand. They always had confidence there was plenty more. And it did seem that the young barrister had made an attempt to appease his conscience by paying for his partner, Clement, to defend Harry.

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“I suppose, by the same token, one or both of the Craigs could have doubled back into the ravine. Perhaps young James was upset that Delaney had forbidden his courtship of Kate.”

Newcombe shook his head. “Craig’s daughter testified under oath that they were in the house by a quarter past eight.”

Murdoch didn’t want to disabuse the innkeeper of his faith in the female half of the population, so he made no comment. Besides, he was making smoke rings.

“What do you intend to do now?” Newcombe asked.

Murdoch shrugged. “I’ll come back with you and have another gander around the ravine. You never know if something new will strike me.”

He actually wanted to talk to Mrs. Bowling, but he thought it wiser not to reveal everything even to a man as apparently honourable as Newcombe.

He had been staring into the dancing flames in the wide hearth while he was ruminating.

Newcombe looked over at him. “I hope you don’t mind my bringing this up, Will, but I think it’s better said than not said. You have been weaving me a bit of a story, haven’t you? You’re not investigating on behalf of the family. You *are* the family, aren’t you. You’re Harry Murdoch’s son.”

His broad, ruddy face was gleaming with a light patina of sweat from the warmth of the room and the rich food they had eaten. Murdoch realised how much he had come to like Newcombe. He smiled ruefully.

“Yes, I am. Sorry I told you a tale, but I thought it might be easier to get answers that way.”

“Absolutely. People would have shut up like clams if they knew who you really were. But I must say, you’ve been doing a bloody good job so far. Wish it had better results.”

“I should do a good job, I’m a detective, well actually an acting detective, Number Four Station.”

Vincent slapped his own knee in delight. “I knew it! Must say, you’re one of the pleasantest frogs I’ve met to date.”

He held out his hand, and they shook on it. Both of them, Murdoch realised, were feeling the effects of the rich port they had been drinking for the past half hour.

Newcombe leaned closer. “How could I have missed it? It was nagging at the back of my mind, but I just couldn’t place you. Now that I look, you do resemble your father. Here, around the eyes, and maybe the mouth a bit. Yes, there’s Harry in there all right.”

Murdoch looked away. He wasn’t sure if he was happy to know that or not.

There was a polite tap on the door, and Joseph came in with a fresh decanter of port.

“Another glass, gentlemen?”

Murdoch waved him away. “Not for me. I’ll never leave here upright.”

“I’ll take one more splash, if that’s all right with you, Will.”

“Of course.” But Murdoch was starting to feel a little worried about how big a bill he was going to have. Before he had left the house, he had taken money from the tin where he kept his cash. Not quite a week’s wages but almost.

Joseph slipped a piece of paper on the side table. “Mr. Quinn sends his compliments, sir. He is sorry he cannot come out to see you, but he is rushed off his feet at the moment.”

“Please tell him the tart was extraordinary.”

“I will. And I do hope your companion will feel better soon.”

Both Murdoch and Newcombe stared at the waiter who, still with solemn face, winked so quickly they could have imagined it.

“He quite lost his appetite, I see.”

Murdoch grinned, blessing Quinn. “That is true.”

Joseph left and Murdoch peeked at the bill. Even being charged for just one person was four dollars and fifty cents. Add a gratuity and it came to almost as much as he earned in four days.

“Savour every drop, Vincent.”

“I intend to lick the glass, old chap,” said the innkeeper, and he did.

Chapter Forty

NEWCOMBE DECIDED TO STAY A LITTLE LONGER in the city and take the opportunity to buy a Christmas present for Maria. Promising to meet him later at the tavern, Murdoch headed back to Shaftesbury Avenue.

He was really not too sanguine about unearthing new evidence, but in spite of that he was curiously happy. He didn't know if his father had, in fact, killed Delaney in a drunken rage or even if it would ever be known for certain one way or the other. Nevertheless, there had been affection between them. He had long given up hope of ever having what he considered to be normal filial feelings. To know that he might be capable of loving his father was an increasing source of joy. Added to that was the anticipation of being with Enid Jones in a few short hours.

When he was on the streetcar, however, lurching and clanking up the gradual incline towards St. Clair, his mood changed again. Harry's predicament was serious indeed. Go over it again, Murdoch said to himself, but this time think as if Harry was telling the truth. That everything had happened the way he said it did. Possibly, a quarrel with Delaney, a blow, and him crawling into the bushes where he lay until Pugh found him. By the time Dr. Semple conducted his examination, Delaney had been dead for some time. The best he could determine from the progress of rigor mortis was that the man had died somewhere between eight-thirty and nine-thirty. It was possible he had died very shortly before his body was discovered, although Semple admitted it was difficult to pin the time down because Delaney was in the water. Logically there were two possibilities. One, that

somebody had been right at his heels and killed him directly after he had the short bout with Harry. Two, that Delaney had continued on his way, wherever he was going, and met his murderer on the way back. Had he followed the path as far as Yonge Street? To what purpose? Convinced they had the right man, the police at Number Seven Station had not pursued an extensive enquiry except for advertising in the newspaper. If Delaney had an assignation, no one was admitting it. And even if he had, it didn't mean there was anything nefarious about it, or that it had anything to do with his death. But here again, assuming Harry had told the absolute truth, how could money have disappeared? The fact that only part of his winnings had gone suggested a payment of some kind. On the other hand, Murdoch was even starting to wonder if the hideout he'd discovered on the way to the Lacey cottage was one used by Delaney. He had assumed a young person, but the hole itself was big enough to accommodate an adult. Had John Delaney been lovesick? Casting spells with frogs? If so, about whom? Jessica Lacey had made no acknowledgement of seeing Delaney that night, so Murdoch assumed the man had not gone as far as the cottage, unless he was a Peeping Tom and had gone to spy on her. That couldn't totally be ruled out. However, for the sake of argument, say he did go to the hideout. On the way back, he could have met somebody who hated him enough to bash him on the head. And that person had been behind him because either Delaney didn't see him coming and was taken unawares or he had turned his back not expecting to be hit, which meant he did not fear his assailant. Murdoch sighed. He didn't feel any clearer.

"You shouldn't sigh like that, young man."

Startled, he looked over at the seat opposite, where an elderly woman in the demure black bonnet of a widow was regarding him with some concern.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am?"

"Every time a person sighs, they lose a drop of blood. You've sighed more than once while you've been sitting there."

"Oh dear, I wasn't aware of that."

Unexpectedly, she smiled at him, a sweet smile that crinkled the fine skin around her eyes. "Are you having problems with your wife?"

"Er, no. I have not had the good fortune to be married."

She actually leaned forward a little to scrutinise him more closely. "I must say, I cannot understand that. You certainly have most agreeable features."

"Thank you, ma'am."

"But then that's not important really in a gentleman, is it? Not so much as with we ladies. With the gentlemen, it's character that counts."

He didn't quite know how to reply to that and was afraid his bachelor state might indicate a serious flaw in his personality.

"Character and money in the bank, don't you think, ma'am?"

She shook her head. "No, I don't. My late husband was as poor as a church mouse when we first married, but he was very hard-working and when the good Lord saw fit to take him, I was left comfortably off."

There was a glint of tears in her pale blue eyes, and Murdoch felt a twinge of guilt that he had been gying her on with his comment.

"I'm glad to hear that," he said with sincerity, and was rewarded by the sweet smile.

At that moment the conductor called out, "St. Clair Avenue next stop. End of the line. All out."

The old lady stood up, swaying slightly at the movement of the streetcar. Murdoch jumped to his feet to steady her. As they came to a halt, he escorted her down to the rear of the car where she could alight. He got off first and helped her down.

“Thank you very much, young man. Promise me no more sighing.” She patted his cheek lightly with her hand. She was wearing pale fawn kid gloves, but they looked a little on the worn side. Perhaps her claim to being comfortably off was exaggerated, thought Murdoch. Or perhaps it was a matter of degree.

“I’ll try not to.” He watched as she walked slowly away, almost wanting to run after her and continue the acquaintance. He had never met any of his grandparents, who had died long before he was born. His father had no living relatives, and his mother’s only sister, Aunt Weldon, had never married. There were no cousins. Now his brother and sister were gone and only his father left. In spite of the old lady’s warning, he sighed so deeply, he must have lost half a pint of blood.

He quickened his pace. The short winter evening was closing in fast, and he was concerned that it would get too dark to go into the ravine.

The path leading down to the creek wasn’t as icy as he’d feared, and he was able to move at a good trot to the bridge. Here the air was damper and thin shreds of mist were drifting over the path. To the west, silhouetting the treetops, the sky was flushed salmon pink against the darkening night.

He continued on along the right-hand path and once again started to climb the steps to the Lacey cottage. Halfway up, he stopped to examine the hideout. The box containing the frog skeleton was no longer there.

The final flight of steps was the steepest, and he was panting when he reached the top of the hill. Here there was a low wooden fence built close to the edge of the ravine in order to squeeze out as much space as possible for the cottage property. He pushed open the gate and walked through. The vegetable garden was bare now but showed evidence of being well-tended. From where he stood, he could see into the cottage. A lamp was lit and the curtains

weren't drawn. A young woman he presumed to be Jessica Lacey was clearly visible in the kitchen. He paused, not wanting to spy on an unsuspecting woman but curious about her. She had not herself testified at the trial. A physician had stated she was in too fragile a state of health, but he had presented her testimony which was uncomplicated. Mrs. Lacey had neither heard nor seen anything on the night of the murder. Her child was taken ill, and she had taken her down to Maria Newcombe. She had remained at the Manchester until next morning, given that the police were coming and going in the ravine.

Jessica was moving slowly like a woman in pain. She took a pot from a hook on the wall, pumped in some water, and placed it on the stove. Murdoch didn't quite know how to warn her of his presence, but he couldn't just stand here at the gate and have her catch him. That would really frighten her. He called out, "Hello, Mrs. Lacey, hello," and proceeded to walk down the path, waving his hand in as friendly a manner as he could. She heard him and turned and stared out of the window. There was still sufficient light for her to make him out, and he continued to smile and wave at her. Her fear was palpable, but there wasn't anything he could do to mitigate it other than what he was doing.

"Do you mind if I come in?" he shouted, not sure if she could hear him but not wanting to move out of sight of her. She came over to the window and pushed it open a crack. Close up, he could see even more clearly the terror in her face. She was young and probably, in usual circumstances, a bonny woman with abundant dark hair and rather refined features. Her eyes were blue, and he could see how shadowed they were with ill health.

He smiled as reassuringly as he could and tipped his hat. "Mrs. Lacey, my name is Williams. I'm sorry if I startled you, but I wonder if I could have a word?"

"What about?"

"I met your husband, Walter, yesterday at the Manchester. And your daughter, whom I must say takes after you for prettiness."

The flattery was blatant, but he was doing everything he could to calm her. He was not succeeding.

"Did he mention me?" he asked. "No."

"I am conducting an investigation into the Delaney case. I was hoping I could talk to you for a moment or two."

If anything she looked even more afraid.

"What sort of investigation?"

Murdoch was beginning to feel ridiculous talking to the woman through the window, but he knew she was not going to let him in.

"I've been, er, hired by the family of the man who is accused of the crime. They want to make sure that there is no miscarriage of justice, that he is guilty as charged."

"He has been tried and convicted."

"That is true. I am simply trying to put everybody's mind at rest once and for all."

"How can I be of help? I already gave a statement to the constable."

"I know, ma'am, and I do apologise again for disturbing you. Do you mind if I ask you one or two questions?"

"What are they?"

"I understand you and your husband rent this cottage from Mr. Delaney, that is, I should say now, from Mrs. Delaney."

"Yes, we do."

"Have you lived here long?"

"Since March."

"Before that?"

"In Alberta, but I fail to see the relevance of the question."

In fact, Murdoch was circling, trying to get her to reveal more about herself.

"Did you know Mr. Delaney well?"

"No, I dealt with Mrs. Delaney."

"In your opinion, ma'am, was he a man who might make enemies?"

"What do you mean?"

"I am trying to determine if there was, in fact, any person other than the man now convicted who might be motivated to kill Mr. Delaney."

She was steadier now, more sure of herself. "I cannot say. He had an enormous funeral by all accounts. He must have been well liked."

"You yourself did not attend the funeral?"

Even in the gloom he could see the flush that swept into her face and neck.

"I was not able to. I was unwell."

He remembered that she had miscarried a child shortly after the time of the murder, and he regretted his question.

"I am getting cold, sir."

"One more question then, Mrs. Lacey. Did you hear anything at all on that night? A cry? A dog barking? Anything?"

"I have said I did not. My child was taken ill. That is all that was of concern to me."

"Did you take notice of the time when you went down to the Manchester?"

"No, I did not."

He stepped back. "Thank you very much, ma'am. I do appreciate your talking to me."

She had closed the window before he finished, and she pulled down the blind, leaving him staring at a blank window. That hadn't got him very far.

He walked around the cottage and began to follow the path that ran along the top of the ravine.

The Delaney house soon came in sight, just on the other side of the rise. Here were no uncurtained windows to look into. All the blinds were drawn, with cracks of light from the upstairs windows. He could just make out the sound of somebody singing, and he assumed Miss Kate was

practising. There was no flute accompaniment. He walked on, hitting a pong of pig food floating on the air.

Chapter Forty-one

JUST AS HE WAS APPROACHING Mrs. Bowling's cottage, he heard the sound of crying. It was odd, not loud, not quite a child's cry, or even one that was expressing pain. It was more rhythmic and repetitious, as if the weeper had lost faith some time ago in ever being heard. He could see now that there was a girl standing outside the Bowling cottage. She banged on the door and wailed again, the crying he had just been hearing.

"Hello there," he called out, and she whirled around. She had a drab brown shawl over her head but no overcoat or gloves, and he could see her arms had reddened with the cold. It was hard to tell her age, maybe fifteen or sixteen.

"Hello," he said again. "Did you get yourself locked out?"

She grinned at him and now that he was closer he realised there was something odd about her: her eyes were blank, her lips slack.

"I'm here to see Mrs. Bowling," he went on, and she nodded vigorously.

"She's in the back feeding chickens." The words were slow and careful, as if she had been coached with pain to articulate properly.

"How did you get locked out?" Murdoch asked.

The girl shrugged. "It's time for my tea. Momma must have forgot." Suddenly, with a shock, Murdoch saw that she was tethered like a dog to a post near the door. There was a leather collar around her ankle with a rope attached. She saw his stare and lifted up her skirt as far as her knees. She had on boots but no stockings.

"Do you want to see some more?" she asked, and he couldn't tell if it was the question of an innocent child or a seasoned whore. He was saved from answering by Mrs. Bowling, who came around the side of the house.

"Nan, stop that at once."

The girl dropped her skirt and whimpered in fear. Mrs. Bowling addressed Murdoch. "What can I do for you?"

"Good afternoon, ma'am, we met yesterday. I came up with Mr. Newcombe."

"Oh yes, I recognise you now."

"I was wondering if I could have a word with you, ma'am."

"I'm just about to feed the chickens. You'll have to come around to the back."

She actually started to head in that direction. "Mrs. Bowling, this young woman has got herself locked out. I assume she is your daughter?"

Mrs. Bowling turned, looked as if she was about to ignore what he'd said, thought better of it, and came back to the porch.

"Yes, this is Nan, my cross and burden in life. As you can see. You might think it cruel that I've tied her up like this, but if I don't she's liable to go wandering off and get herself into trouble. I can't afford to have somebody watch her every minute of the day, and I work as you saw."

"She's cold. She should be inside."

"Fresh air's good for her," said Mrs. Bowling sullenly, but she unbuckled the collar from the girl's leg, opened the door, and directed Nan inside. The girl went obediently, casting one glance at Murdoch. There was no intelligence in those eyes. Nan should be in an institution where he was certain she would receive better care. As if she had read his mind, Mrs. Bowling said, "People are always telling me I should put her in the asylum, but the poor child is so attached to her own flesh and blood she would pine away. So I put up with her sly ways and do my best. The Lord will give me my reward in heaven."

Murdoch bit back his own anger. "From what I witnessed yesterday, I'd say you share similar burdens with Mrs. Delaney."

"It isn't the same at all. Her son was quite normal until his accident. And he is so most of the time now. She doesn't know how to handle him."

"Unlike you, ma'am."

She gave him a sharp glance, trying to assess the implications of what he'd said. He kept his face neutral.

She shrugged. "Necessity is a good teacher."

She started off for the rear of the cottage, and he went after her. Nan was watching them from the window, and he smiled and waved at her. To his astonishment, she stuck out her tongue and ran her forefinger around her nipple.

There were a half-dozen scrawny chickens scratching and pecking in the hard, mud-crusted ground by the chicken shed. Mrs. Bowling picked up a bucket and poured mashed grain into the trough, and the hens ran over clucking in excitement. A big rooster with glistening green-gold plumage and bright red dewlaps pushed his way through them to get closer to the source of the food. Mrs. Bowling scooped some of the seed and held out her cupped hand.

"Here, Chanty."

The cockerel pecked from her hand, and she beamed at him as if he were a pet dog. "There's my clever boy. Are you going to make Momma some good eggs?"

At that moment Murdoch noticed one of the hens, which was on the fringe of the group, had red streaks down her chest.

"What happened to that one?" he asked, pointing.

"She got herself pecked. She was lucky I happened by else they've had killed her. They see blood, and they go for it. Nocky bird. She just stood there letting them do it."

"Good Lord, why do they do that? It's one of their own."

Mrs. Bowling was stroking the rooster's coxcomb. He actually seemed to like what she was doing and didn't move

away.

"They sense weakness and it sends them into a blood frenzy." She sniffed. "Dogs are the same. And so are people, if you ask me. They sense a soft spot, any kind of weakness, and they'll go for it. To destroy. Especially men."

Her tone was so bitter and cynical that Murdoch bristled.

"Not everybody is like that surely, Mrs. Bowling?"

"Aren't they? God expelled Adam and Eve from Paradise because of our base nature, and we've been disobeying Him ever since."

Suddenly one of the hens rushed over to the injured chicken and pecked it hard on the chest. A gout of blood spurted out. A second hen joined the first and within seconds they were both stabbing at the other chicken, drawing blood. It stood transfixed, not running away. Mrs. Bowling didn't move.

"Shoo!" shouted Murdoch, and he ran at the attackers clapping his hands. He was almost on top of them before they took any heed. He grabbed up the injured bird.

"Won't do any good," said Mrs. Bowling. "Not unless you want to take her home with you. They've got a taste now, and they'll go after her again till she's dead."

"Can't you separate her until she heals? She must be worth something to you."

"She won't be wasted. She'll be a good stew."

"I'll take her then."

"You'll have to pay."

"That doesn't matter."

The poor chicken was bleeding all down his coat, but he didn't care. He managed to fish in his pocket and found a dollar.

"Here."

"That's not enough for a good layer."

"And a pot of stew is fifty cents, so you're making a profit."

Whatever it was, she looked pleased, as if she had enjoyed the skirmish. She put the money in the pocket of her apron.

"I doubt you came all the way up here to rescue my birds. What do you want?"

The hen struggled feebly in his hands. "Can you do anything here?" he asked.

"Isn't worth it. One of them got through to its heart. Look."

Murdoch could see a deep puncture wound that was pulsing blood. He knew he was being sentimental about this poor creature, but he couldn't help himself.

"Do you have a cloth I can bandage her with? Anything?"

Mrs. Bowling wiped her hands down the sides of her coat, which was a long, man-sized check overcoat.

"We might as well go in. It's frigid out here."

She turned on her heel, leaving Murdoch to hurry after her. The chicken's long neck drooped over his elbow, and the beak was gaping.

At the back door, his reluctant hostess took a key from her pocket and went inside. Murdoch followed and almost gagged on the fetid air in the room, a sour smell overlaid with acrid smoke from the woodstove. Nan was sitting on a chair that she had pulled close to the stove in the corner of the room. There was only one small lamp that had been lit, and the wick was turned down low.

"What happened to the chook?" She got up and came toward them, but her mother shooed her away with an angry gesture.

"Nan, leave it alone. Go and sit on the couch until I tell you."

The girl scurried over to a bed sofa that was against the far wall. In size and shape this cottage seemed identical to what he had glimpsed of the Lacey one, but whereas that had appeared neat and pretty, this room was dirty with broken mismatched chairs. There was a beige-coloured

drugget on the floor that looked so dusty he almost sneezed at the mere sight of it.

"Bring the wretched thing over to the sink," said Mrs. Bowling. She took a grubby strip of cloth from a hook and wrapped it tightly around the bird's chest. The wing fluttered briefly but that was all the response.

"Will it live?" Murdoch asked.

"Probably not. But you said as you wanted me to do something."

She laid the stricken hen on the draining board beside the sink, and for a minute he thought she was going to reach for a chopping knife and take off its head. However, she took down a teapot from the window ledge.

"I could do with a cup of tea; I suppose you could too?"

Not exactly gracious, good society manners, but he accepted, hoping he wouldn't catch some dirt-engendered disease. There was a steaming kettle on the stove, and she poured some hot water into the pot, swished it around, then emptied it. Then she added three large scoops of black tea leaves from a tin caddy and made the tea. Murdoch noticed that the pot was a good china and realised he'd seen that same pattern in the Delaney house. As he glanced around the room, he saw there were two lush green velvet throws on the couch and the chair. They looked new.

Nan was watching him and her mother. When she met his eyes she smiled, and for a moment Murdoch quailed, wondering what would follow. However, this time the smile was that of a child, rather shy and sweet.

Mrs. Bowling poured tea into a china cup and handed it to him without the saucer.

"We don't have any milk, and the sugar's low. I hope you can drink it like this."

"Of course. Thank you."

She hadn't asked him to sit down, but he went to the table and sat in the wooden chair. He sipped the tea. In spite of

the fact that he usually liked his brew sweet and milky, it tasted good. Fresh and strong.

"I see you share the same pattern as Mrs. Delaney," he said, tapping the cup.

"A gift."

"You have a generous employer," he said, pointing. "I assume she gave you those handsome covers as well."

Mrs. Bowling frowned. "As a matter of fact, she did. I get my due. That's a big house to take care of. And Mrs. Delaney understands the cross I have to bear." She remained where she was, leaning against the sink. "Well, what do you want? What's the reason I'm honoured with a visitor? You're not on the lookout for a dog, I hope. I don't know nothing about them. You'll have to talk to Vincent."

There it was again, the sly suggestion that there was a special relationship between her and the innkeeper.

"I'm doing a further investigation into Mr. Delaney's death."

She regarded him over the top of her cup. Her eyes were shrewd.

"What do you mean a further investigation? I thought everything was finished. The Murdoch fellow is going to hang soon, isn't he?"

"I'm tying up loose ends, as it were, just in case. We wouldn't want an innocent man to die, would we?"

She frowned. "The Lord is the great Judge, not us. On the day of judgement we will all know as we shall be known." She took a noisy gulp of tea. "Who are you then? By what authority are you acting?"

"I'm a detective and I'm acting in a private capacity for the family."

"Are you?" Again she looked at him shrewdly. "What's it to do with me?"

"I'd like to ask you some questions. I noticed you didn't testify at the trial."

"I wasn't asked. The constable talked to me once but decided I had nothing of importance to say."

"Was that true?"

"I suppose so."

Murdoch could see that the cloth around the chicken's breast was stained a bright crimson, but it was still breathing.

"Do you mind repeating to me what you told the constable?"

"He asked me if I had heard anything that night and where I was."

She paused maddeningly and Murdoch tried to keep back his impatience.

"And what did you tell him, Mrs. Bowling?"

"I was here in my own house. I didn't hear anything except the wind and the birds in the trees."

"When did you know that Mr. Delaney had been killed?"

"Oh, I heard that ruckus all right. That was later when they came to tell the missus. She carried on like a scalded cat."

"And what time was that?"

"I couldn't say. Me and Nan go to sleep when it's dark. Saves on candles. It could have been the middle of the night as far as I know."

Murdoch put his mug down on the table, unbuttoned his coat, and pulled his watch out of his vest pocket.

"Speaking of time, I mustn't linger. What does your clock say, Mrs. Bowling?"

His ruse seemed transparent to him, but she shrugged. "I don't have a clock. No need. Chanty wakes us up every morning, rain or shine, and as I said we go to bed when we've had supper."

Murdoch guessed she had never learned to tell the time. He replaced his watch.

"I understand that Mrs. Lacey came past your house with her little daughter about nine o'clock that night. The child

was unwell, and she was taking her down to the Manchester tavern where her husband works.”

“She might have. I didn’t hear or see her.”

Nan interrupted her. “No, Momma. Sally was crying.” Nan imitated the sound of a child crying, startlingly loud. “She went down the path.”

“Don’t be foolish, Nan. That must have been a different time.”

“No, Momma, I remember. It was the same night Philip’s poppa died. I do remember.”

She was proud of herself for having such important information.

Murdoch looked over at Mrs. Bowling. “Do you mind if I ask Nan the same questions?”

“Yes, I do mind. You can see how handicapped she is. She won’t understand you, and she’ll get upset.”

Nan spoke out in an excited voice. “I can answer, Momma. Let me answer a question. Please, Momma, let me.”

“No, it has nothing to do with you, and what are you doing, sitting there listening to what doesn’t concern you. Get off upstairs.”

Nan looked as if she was going to burst into tears. Murdoch reached into his pocket again.

“My client would be glad of any information relating to the case, Mrs. Bowling. I understand this is inconvenient for you, and I hope I can compensate for your time.”

He laid a dollar bill on the table. He didn’t like the feeling at all. It was as if she were a procuress.

“Besides, Nan is obviously going to be more upset if I don’t say anything.”

Mrs. Bowling didn’t touch the money. He dipped into his pocket again and added two twenty-five-cent pieces.

“Do what you like, then,” she said, “but I warn you she’s got no sense.”

Murdoch walked over to the girl and squatted in front of her.

"Nan, do you remember what happened to Mr. Delaney?"

She nodded her head with great vigour. "Oh, yes. He had his neck wrung until he was dead."

Murdoch ignored the guffaw from behind him. "Do you know when that occurred? What time of the year it was?"

She put her head to one side and brought her forefinger to her chin in a grotesque imitation of a coy, genteel young woman.

"It was hot. When it's hot, it means it is summertime."

"Could you name the month?"

She scrunched up her face to concentrate. "April, I think."

"Oh, Nan, what a stupid girl you are," said her mother from behind Murdoch.

He smiled at the girl. "I've known it to be very hot in April. But what I am more interested in is the night when Mr. Delaney died. Is there anything you can tell me about that night? Your momma says there was a lot of noise after you had both gone to bed that woke you up. Do you remember that?"

"Mrs. Delaney was crying because Mr. Delaney had his neck wrung. Momma went up to see what was the matter, but I stayed here out of the way. I didn't mind though because I had Flash to play with. Have you seen Flash? He's Philip's dog, but he likes me best."

"Don't tell lies, Nan," snapped her mother. "You didn't have no dog here. You were fast asleep like the piece of wood you are."

Nan looked confused. "I did see Flash, Momma. And the other dog. Philip brought them to play with me. I couldn't sleep because it was so hot. We played for a long, long time because Philip was sad and needed a bolster. His poppa swatted him, and he fell out of the wagon and hurt his head."

"Nan!"

Murdoch tried to ignore Mrs. Bowling. "When did that happen, Nan?" "Last week."

"See, what did I tell you?" interjected her mother.

"Philip's poppa has passed away. I don't think it could have been last week, Nan."

"I know that. It was a long, long time ago. Philip has a sweetheart, but his poppa was very cross and swatted him."

Without turning around, Murdoch took another twenty-five-cent piece from his pocket and held it up. Mrs. Bowling managed to hold her tongue.

"His poppa swatted him because he had a sweetheart?"

Nan shook her head vigorously. "Oh no! Not for that. He doesn't know. Philip is my brother, and he tells me."

"He's lucky to have somebody to talk to. I had a sister, but she has gone to heaven."

Nan leaned forward and planted a wet kiss on his cheek. "You must be sad. Philip was very sad when he come, but I bolstered him again and we played with the dogs. The other dog wasn't as nice as Flash."

"What dog was that, Nan?"

"I forget his name, but he wanted to bite me."

Mrs. Bowling couldn't hold back any longer, and she approached the two of them. "I told you, she don't have any sense."

"It's not true then? Philip Delaney wasn't here that night?"

"Of course he wasn't. He does come over on occasion. He's as much a child as she is. They are good companions. Nan thinks that makes them brother and sister. She likes the dog, and they play together. But she's got it mixed up. She does that."

To prove her point, she leaned toward her daughter. "Nan, tell the gentleman what day this is?"

Happy for the attention, the girl grinned. "It is March tenth. In seven days' time it will be the birthday of the Lord Jesus, which took place on December fifth more than twenty years ago."

"And did Philip bring Flash over to see you this week?"

"He came yesterday."

Mrs. Bowling shook her head. "He hasn't been here for a while."

Nan looked over at her mother, and her expression was sly. "You didn't see him, Momma. You were asleep. He did come yesterday. He brought a puppy, a baby dog. We played tag, and Flash fetched every one of the sticks I threw for him."

"That must have been fun," said Murdoch. "I've met Flash, and he likes to run. But it wasn't this puppy you saw in the summer, was it?"

"No."

"What colour was the other little dog Philip brought? The nasty one?"

"She doesn't know," interjected Mrs. Bowling.

"I do, Momma. It looked like ashes. I called it Ashes, but that wasn't its real name." She looked solemnly at Murdoch. "Momma won't let me play in the woods anymore. She says I'm too big. I used to play all day long. I got sweeties."

Whatever she'd said made her mother angry. "There she goes, lying again. I've never let her play on her own. She needs watching all the time. What sort of mother would let a big girl with no sense like her go wandering off?"

The girl was shrinking back on the couch, watching her mother intently. Murdoch stood up. He didn't think he was going to get any more information, and he didn't want to make Nan's life more difficult than it already was.

"Thank you for answering my questions, Nan. You have been very helpful. Thank you, Mrs. Bowling."

He walked back to the sink, noticing that the money was no longer on the table.

The wounded chicken was gasping, and gently, he picked it up. Both Mrs. Bowling and Nan were watching him. He touched the brim of his hat in acknowledgement and left.

By the time he got to the bottom of the hill, the bird was dead, and he buried it under a mound of ice-rimmed leaves.

Chapter Forty-two

ALTHOUGH THE MANCHESTER HAD JUST OPENED , the taproom was already almost full. Unlike the Bowling cottage, the smell in here was salubrious, wood smoke mixing with roasting pork. The wall sconces blazed with light, and a fire was crackling in the fireplace. Murdoch stood for a moment at the threshold, but Vince Newcombe, who was at the serving window, saw him and shouted out a greeting. "Will, come on in."

There was a smattering of applause, which momentarily disconcerted him until he realised it wasn't for him but for Mr. Patrick Pugh, who was standing by the hearth. There was a small circle of space around him, and several customers were watching. Apparently, he had just completed some kind of magic trick.

Newcombe indicated Murdoch should go to one of the fireside benches and he did so, making his way through the cluster of toppers, who at this point were friendly and thirsty. The innkeeper drew a tankard of ale and brought it over.

"Mr. Clarry, move your rear end in a few inches and let Mr. Williams sit down."

The elderly man, whose face was completely obscured with a full, old-fashioned beard and bushy side-whiskers, slid over good-humouredly, and Murdoch squeezed himself in beside him.

"Good evening to you," he said.

"Likewise," replied the old man.

Newcombe placed the tankard in front of Murdoch. "You look like you could use this." He nodded in the direction of

the man by the fireplace. "Mr. Pugh is honouring us with some entertainment."

Pugh heard him and grinned an acknowledgement. The streak of white hair at his temples was particularly vivid in the firelight.

He approached Murdoch's neighbour. "Mr. Clarry, I heard you complaining yesterday that you didn't have two quarters to rub together. Is that right?"

"Certainly is. I'm not as young as I used to be. Can't work."

In spite of these words there was something complacent in the old man's voice that belied what he was saying.

"You're giving us a nailer, Mr. Clarry. I'd say you are a rich man indeed."

Pugh reached forward and under the man's full beard. He pulled out a shiny silver dollar. "My, my, a strange place to put your savings ... and what's this?"

Another coin appeared magically from behind Clarry's right ear. "Good gracious, you've got at least two dollars tucked in here," said Pugh, and removed another coin. To everybody's amusement, Clarry reached up and pulled at his ear lobe as if it was a teat full of silver. "Ah, here's another," said Pugh, and he removed a fourth coin from Clarry's left ear. He addressed his audience. "I'd say Mr. Clarry could easily pay for a round, don't you?"

A chorus of yeahs and whistles was the answer. "Give me the money then," said the old man. "I'll be glad to treat."

"Sorry, can't do that. Finders keepers. But I tell you what, if you can find those coins, they are yours."

It looked as if Pugh had dropped the silver into his pocket, they had heard each coin clink as he did so, but he turned his pockets inside out and they were empty. Clarry stood up. "I'm going to pat you down then. Here let me out." This remark was addressed to Murdoch, and he shoved him a little. Murdoch knew that Mr. Clarry wasn't too happy at being tricked.

Pugh stepped back. "Tell you what. Winner take all on this next trick. You win, I pay. I win, you pay. Agreed?"

"What is it?"

"I am going to bet that I can cut right through your wrists, through flesh and bone, using only a silk handkerchief. Let's see them."

Clarry held up his hands. His knuckles were knobby, the skin leathery, and his wrists thick. Pugh turned over his right hand to look at the palm. "A farmer, I see."

"That's right."

"Are you game then?"

"Just as long as you leave my goolies intact. My wife wouldn't like it if anything happened to them."

There was a loud jeering from the other customers. "Whooee. You're dreaming, Jonah. She hasn't seen them in years," cried out one of the men, almost a twin of Clarry with his beard and rough farmer's complexion.

"Come on, men. Give him a chance," called out Newcombe, ever the host. "Let's see the trick."

Pugh spun around. "Does anybody have a silk handkerchief they can lend me? I'd prefer a clean one. You, sir. Yours will do."

A younger man was seated at the opposite bench. He was wearing a corduroy jacket and trousers and a black slouch hat. Around his neck was knotted a bright blue-and-yellow handkerchief. He shrank back. "What are you going to do with it? I just bought it."

"Fear not. It will be returned to you intact, sir, or I myself will pay twice the cost."

Pugh wasn't to be denied, and the man undid the handkerchief and handed it over. Underneath he revealed a red flannel collarless shirt.

"What did this cost you? Twelve cents?" asked Pugh. "No! Twenty-five."

Pugh ran the handkerchief through his fingers. "You were robbed, sir. But never mind. It will do. Now where's my vict-I

mean my helper. Mr. Clarry, show me your wrist. Either one will do."

Clarry held out his right arm and pushed back his sleeve so that his wrist was exposed. Pugh twisted the handkerchief into a rope and began to wrap it around Clarry's wrist.

"I must tell you gentlemen I have performed this trick for the best English society. Prince Albert himself assisted me."

The men watching him groaned and banged on the table to express their disbelief.

"Tell us another, Pugh. You're as full of wind and piss as a whore's belly," said one man.

Pugh worked fast and knotted the handkerchief tightly.

"Clasp your two hands together if you please, sir, so there can be no doubt of my authenticity."

Clarry did so and the rest of the men went quiet. Pugh's voice was commanding.

"I am now going to draw up this handkerchief by means of magic right through the flesh. Keep your hands tight together, sir."

Pugh took one end of the handkerchief in each hand. "One, two ... no wait, this is a particularly difficult trick to do. I wouldn't mind a little assistance. Count with me. ONE. TWO ." The men joined in and on a loud "THREE ," Pugh pulled the handkerchief, still knotted, up through Clarry's wrist. "Ha!" He waved it in the air, while they all clapped; then he tossed it over to its original owner.

Clarry was examining his wrist. "How the devil did he do that?"

Murdoch didn't respond. During the trick, he saw for the first time that the clever Mr. Pugh was missing the tip of his middle finger on the left hand! He took a drink of beer. What the hell did that mean? He couldn't believe there were two men in his sphere, both of whom were identically maimed. But Billy had sworn that the man spying on Murdoch was

pale and nondescript, rather fat, with a moustache. Quinn's dog procurer was described in the same way. He stared at Pugh, who was slaking his thirst from one of the mugs now offered to him by his admiring audience. He was clean shaven, slim in his brown guernsey and dark trousers. But a false moustache was an easy disguise to assume, as was padding. It had to be the same man. But what the hell was he doing? Why all the subterfuge?

Suddenly, Pugh looked over at him, and their eyes met. For a moment Murdoch feared he could even read minds.

"Listen up, you toppers. One more entertainment. For the round. Brain versus brawn. Mr. Newcombe, may I avail myself of your good broom?"

"Of course. Help yourself."

Pugh picked up the corn broom that was leaning against the mantelpiece. "I am going to show you an amazing feat. As you can see, I can never be called a big man. Five feet, three inches in my boots is all I can claim. But I am going to ask the assistance of a much taller and stronger man to see if he can push me over using this broom. You, sir, next to Mr. Clarry. Mr. Williams, isn't it? You look like a fit man. Will you come up and participate in a little fun?"

"Why not," said Murdoch, and he got to his feet. He was trying to be nonchalant, but he felt tense and angry. The little rat wasn't going to get the better of him if he could help it.

Wagers immediately began to be placed, coins and dollar bills slapped down on the tables. Murdoch heard them call out.

"Three to one on the conjurer. I'll give you five against."

Murdoch had a hazy sense that he was not getting a lot of favour.

"Hold this broom horizontally like so across your chest. Now, I am going to make things easier for you. I will oppose you using only my one thumb, like so."

Pugh placed his thumb lightly on the broom handle. "Now, Mr. Williams, push me over. If you can!"

Murdoch pushed hard on the broom. He knew there had to be a catch in it, but he didn't care. He'd enjoy seeing the cocky rooster sprawling on the floor. That didn't happen. Pugh remained upright, his thumb touching the broom. "Harder, Mr. Williams. A young lady could do better."

Murdoch felt himself flush, and he pushed again. There was a strong resistance on the other side of the broom. Pugh started to whistle merrily, his position unchanged. Murdoch tried again. He was proud of his strong legs and back. With a grunt, he put his back into it, but the resistance was even stronger.

The men called out, "Get on! Shove him over! Go!"

Finally, Murdoch had to stop he was so out of breath. He stepped back, panting.

"Do you concede the match?" asked Pugh.

"No. One more try."

"Very well. I will make it even easier. I will stand on one foot." He did so, tucking his left foot across his right calf. "Now go."

Murdoch took a deep breath and pushed as hard as he could. Nothing happened. Pugh didn't move an inch. The men were cat-calling. He had to stop.

"Concede?"

"No!"

At that moment Newcombe stepped forward. "This is a man who won't give up until the Other place freezes. Come on, Mr. Williams, you've been fairly beat. Or unfairly. It was good entertainment, and the next round is on the house."

He indicated Walter Lacey, who had been leaning through the bar window watching.

"Walt here will fill up your mugs. Once only, so don't think you can gulp 'em down and get seconds."

There was a surge as the men closest to the pumps went for their refills. Newcombe patted Murdoch on the shoulder.

"I've seen him do it before. It's a trick, but devil take me if I know how he does it. He's withstood men even heavier than you."

Pugh had tossed back a glass of whiskey, and he wiped his hand across his mouth. He grinned at Murdoch. "They may have been bigger but none as stubborn. Shake on it, sir."

He held out his hand. Murdoch went as if to accept the handshake, but instead he caught Pugh by the other wrist and twisted his hand around palm side up. "You've had an accident I see, sir."

"Ah yes. Not serious, thank goodness."

He pulled his hand away and held up the truncated finger. "A snake bit me when I was a boy. I got between him and my infant sister, who was cooing on the grass."

"Ha!" exclaimed one of the toppers, who was nearby. "I thought you told us last week that you was stamped on by a wild buffalo. You was caught in a stampede, and you was rescuing a little puppy dog at the time. He said that, didn't he, Vince?"

Pugh didn't give him a chance to reply. "Both are true, my dear sir. I have lost the tip of my finger on two separate occasions."

"Carry on like that and you won't have anything left."

More laughter and Pugh bowed in acknowledgement. Murdoch felt completely at a loss, and he struggled to control himself. He didn't know how to break through the man's composure, and he was burning to do so. If he had an excuse, he would have happily asked him to step outside, but he knew he was being unreasonable. The crowd broke up into smaller groups, and Murdoch took his seat on the bench. Pugh sat on the other end next to Mr. Clarry. Newcombe brought three foaming tankards.

"On the house."

"Where's Mr. Craig tonight?" asked Pugh, wiping foam from his lip with the back of his hand.

"Haven't seen him yet. Or James. They're late."

"Oh, didn't you hear?" said another man nearby. "I was by there this afternoon with my delivery. Mr. Craig's mother's been taken poorly. She lives in America somewhere, and he and his lad have had to go off to see her." His voice dropped. "She might not live to see Saturday."

"Have they all gone? The entire family?" asked Pugh, and Murdoch could feel the sudden tension.

"No, just Mr. Craig and his son and the aunt who lives with them. Missus isn't that well either, and Miss Adelia is staying to look after her." The man looked over at Pugh, slyly. "If that's what's worrying you."

Pugh shrugged. "Well, she is a mighty pretty lady."

He stood up and fished some coins, regular fashion, from his pocket. "In fact, I think I should go and pay her a call. Offer my sympathies."

Grabbing his hat from one of the hooks by the door, he left.

The baker winked at the other men. "I'd say he's a smitten man, wouldn't you? That was one of the fastest exits I've seen since my dog got the scent of the bitch down the road. Mr. Pugh's tool was practically dragging on the ground."

"Watch your tongue, Driscoll," interjected Newcombe. "I won't have decent women talked about in that fashion."

"Hold on, Vince. No aspersions on the young lady. I was referring only to our fast friend."

"That's as may be, but I won't tolerate coarse language in here and you know it. What if my Maria was to come in and hear you?"

Driscoll shrugged, unperturbed. It was obvious that he considered overhearing vulgarities went with the territory, and if they were going to run a tavern they must know that.

Murdoch gulped down some of the sharp-tasting ale. Was Pugh upset at the thought that Miss Craig might have left? If he was courting her, surely he wasn't also chasing Enid

Jones? Damn. He didn't know if he should go after him. But if he did, then what?

Suddenly his eyes met those of Walter Lacey, who was leaning in the open window to the bar. The barkeeper had been scrutinising him, he realised. Murdoch considered himself to be adept at reading unspoken thoughts on other men's faces, but he couldn't quite fathom Lacey's expression. Not malevolent exactly, but as intense as a wolf watching its prey. He felt a stab of anger at being the object of this stare, and he tipped his finger to his forehead. Lacey looked away, quickly wiping some nonexistent spilled beer from the counter.

Murdoch got up and went over to the farther table, where Newcombe was collecting empty mugs.

"Vince, can I have a word with you in private?"

"This minute?"

"I'd appreciate it." He looked at him. "It's concerning Mrs. Bowling and her daughter."

"Right! I'll hand these glasses over to Walter. We can go to the parlour."

Newcombe was no good at dissembling, and Murdoch saw how nervous his request had made him.

Chapter Forty-three

THE INNKEEPER FOLLOWED MURDOCH into the parlour then turned the key in the lock.

"People wander around," he said, nodding in the direction of the taproom. "Please have a seat."

There was no question that there were plenty of chairs to choose from, the problem was negotiating a path through the furniture to any one of them. The room was filled with small tables, and on each one of them was a glass case under which was either a stuffed member of the dog family or representatives of their prey. He didn't dare get Newcombe launched on a history of each piece, so he got straight to the point and remained standing.

"Vince, I just came from talking to Mrs. Bowling, and I met her daughter. Nan said some troubling things, but I couldn't quite determine if they were true or not."

"Not true, I'm sure. Poor girl isn't right in the head as you could see."

"She certainly seemed muddled but not completely in unreality."

Newcombe regarded him uneasily. "What did she say?"

"That Philip Delaney was at their cottage the night his father died. However, according to his testimony and that of his mother, after the match he went directly from here to his own house, where he stayed until she sent him to look for his father."

It was obvious this wasn't what Newcombe had been expecting him to say, and Murdoch thought he was relieved.

"Philip does visit Nan to play with the dog. She probably got the days mixed up."

"She said Philip brought two dogs with him, Flash and a grey dog that, by the sound of it, could only have been Havoc."

"No, Will, no. I do appreciate the peculiarity of your circumstances, but you're clutching at straws. Nan mixes up times when events take place. Don't forget, the terrier was on the loose when Mr. Pugh found Delaney. Maybe the little cur wandered up to the Bowling cottage and Nan saw him, then in her mind added him to a visit Philip had made on another occasion."

"She didn't sound that confused, Vince. Not about this."

Newcombe went and sat in the armchair by the hearth. "Forgive me saying so, Will, but I know the girl better than you do. You can't rely on anything she says. And besides, even if by a remote stretch of the imagination she did get it right and Philip came to visit her that night, what does it prove?"

"That the boy was lying. He wasn't at home."

Newcombe rubbed at his head as if he were polishing it. "Well now, Philip Delaney isn't quite accountable either. His memory isn't the best."

"Nan said he has a sweetheart. Does he?"

"Not that I know of. He's a boy in a man's body, don't forget. I don't think any proper young woman would encourage him."

"By the same token, Nan is a girl in a woman's body, but I doubt we men are always as scrupulous."

Newcombe flinched like somebody whose sore tooth had just been probed by a dentist. He reached up and straightened one of the half-dozen photographs that hung in a line on the wall.

"Bad business," he said ambiguously.

"Vince, listen to me. I don't have time for niceties. There's too much at stake. Why is it that I keep getting the impression you want to hide something? And I don't mean about your charity act with Mrs. Bowling's ale." He caught

Newcombe by the arm, forcing him to keep still. "Are you poking Nan? Is that the real reason you're visiting the cottage? Is that why you don't want your wife to know?"

Newcombe stared at him, appalled. "My God, no. How could you think that?"

"Because I saw the girl. She's got the wiles of a whore. Some men find that appealing."

"Not me. I promise you, I don't."

"Is it her mother then? Is the surly Mrs. Bowling your mistress?"

Newcombe shook off his hand. "No, she is not. You wouldn't even say such a thing if you knew me better. And if you knew my Maria."

"What is going on then? Tell me, because I know there's something between you and Mrs. Bowling."

The innkeeper moved away from him and perched on the edge of one of the armchairs. "You're right but I swear it's not on my part. Ucillus acts cosy like that all the time."

"Why do you keep visiting her then?"

"I told you, I feel sorry for her. The girl is a handful."

"I don't believe you, Vince."

"Whether you do or not isn't the point. Besides it has nothing to do with your father's case."

"Let me be the judge of that."

Newcombe stared at him, then he slumped back in the chair. "Will you promise not to repeat what I tell you?"

"That depends on what you tell me. If it is not, in fact, relevant, I'll forget it."

Newcombe picked up a smaller glass case and absent-mindedly rotated it to get the best view. There was a stuffed weasel inside.

"My Tripper got this one when she was only one year old."

"Vince, not now, please."

"All right, all right." He returned the weasel to its place. "I knew Ucillus Bowling many years ago. Fifteen to be precise. I had just arrived in Canada. I went to Peterborough first of

all. Maria and me were engaged, but she was still in England ... I'm ashamed of myself and will be forever, but it's a common story. I was lonely. I met Ucillus, who was eager to show me how welcoming Canadian girls could be. I succumbed. The whole affair lasted no more than a fortnight at most, and I told her I couldn't continue. I moved away to Toronto and got work in a hotel. She hadn't seemed to be bothered much by me going, and I never expected to see her again. Then she showed up here just over a year ago. She had a daughter in tow." He nodded at Murdoch. "I can see you're expecting what comes next. She said Nan was mine. She'd never married, and there's no doubt in my mind she'd many another man in her bed. But what could I do? She didn't want much from me, just some money every now and again. I didn't want to tell Maria I'd been unfaithful to her, and I wanted to do the best I could by the girl." He held out his hands in a gesture of supplication. "There you have it. I told you it wasn't relevant to your situation."

Murdoch studied Vince's face for a moment. "Has Nan been in the habit of wandering about in the woods?"

Newcombe looked away and again Murdoch caught the uneasy expression in his eyes. He was not a difficult man to read, and he suspected Maria knew more than Vince gave her credit for.

He moved closer. "Why is it, Vince, that every time we get near the topic of this girl, you look like a poacher caught with a brace of pheasants in your hands? No, don't gammon me. I believe what you've told me already...."

"Thank goodness...."

"But you haven't said everything there is to say, have you? What are you hiding?" "Nothing.... I, er ..."

"Will you please answer my question. Her mother had the girl tied up like a dog. Why?"

Newcombe's shoulders slumped. "Nan did start slipping out of the house. Ucillus likes her drink, and the girl can be cunning. She'd go when her mother was asleep. I started to

hear gossip, real covert, mostly when the men were in their cups; but it seemed she had picked up ways more becoming to a woman of the night than a young girl. Thank God nobody, as far as I knew, was prepared to take advantage of her; although I made it clear there would be no funny business from the men or they would hear from me. But I was sure it was only a matter of time before somebody trespassed. I warned her mother, and I myself try to keep a good lookout."

"Was Delaney one of those men? He would have seen her often enough. Was he titillated by the girl?"

Newcombe sighed. "Yes, he was. I was on my way to visit Ucilus one afternoon in the spring. I came across him and Nan. He tried to deny it, but I thought he was on the verge of taking her. I warned him off."

"I'd say it's a good thing you have an alibi for the time of his murder, Vince."

"Good Lord, you don't think I ... I'm not that sort of a fellow. I might give him a good talking to or even a swat but never like that ..."

"All right, all right. As I said, you are covered. Unless you and Mr. Pugh are shielding each other."

Newcombe looked so appalled that Murdoch couldn't keep him in his misery much longer.

"I'm talking like a policeman, Vince. There are moments when you suspect everybody. Nevertheless, what you're telling me might not be as irrelevant as you think. Damnation, this should have come out at the trial."

"Will, it doesn't change anything."

"The jury might not have been as antagonistic towards Harry if they knew this about Delaney. Not quite such an upstanding Christian after all."

Newcombe's voice was kind. "They did know. They live here and there's always been talk about him. But I must emphasize, I only found him with Nan one time. If that had

come out, all it would have accomplished is several lives being dragged through the mud."

"And as it stands, only one man's life is getting all dirty. But a man who they didn't know. How convenient."

"Come on, Will. I can understand you being bitter, but so far you haven't convinced me somebody other than your father killed John Delaney."

There was a rap on the door and Lacey called. "Mr. Newcombe, are you done? Mr. Clarry wants to settle his bill."

"I'll be right there, Walter." Newcombe turned. "I'd better get back." He pressed Murdoch's arm. "Sorry about all of this."

He went to the door, unlocked it, and ushered Murdoch out into the hall. Lacey was waiting for them.

"Everything all right, Mr. Newcombe?"

"Yes, thank you, Walter. I was showing Mr. Williams the collection."

Chapter Forty-four

ENID HAD NOT EXTINGUISHED the bedside candle, and the soft light ruddied her bare shoulders and arms. She was lying on her back, her eyes closed, he on his side facing her. He could never have imagined a woman's body was so soft. This time making love with Enid was, if possible, even more sensual. He wasn't as afraid he wouldn't know what to do or, worse, be incapable of intimacy. When he was working at the logging camp, the end of the day talk frequently turned to sexual matters. Full of the strong beer brewed at the camp, the men boasted, piss proud of their sexual exploits. Murdoch was only eighteen, uninitiated into the mysteries, but he would never have dared to admit that, as he knew the hazing would have been relentless. So he pretended, saying little, getting the reputation of being closemouthed. He was capable of showing a hot temper and didn't hesitate to follow up with his fists if need be. However, at the end of the day the only place to be was in the dining hut, so whether he liked it or not, he got a certain kind of education. He'd had no idea how many ways it was possible for men and women to copulate and how many expressions existed to describe these positions. "Knee tremblers" up against the back walls of taverns; "taking flyers" with women, fully clothed. The loggers liked what they called "willing tits," the rare ones who were as eager for connections as the men. A lot of them had contracted Venus's curse, but this was another occasion to boast as if it were a mark of manhood rather than a sin, not to mention a painful condition. What Murdoch soon discovered was that the men feared the unwanted by-blow much less than they

feared impotency; and their hatred for sodomites, those who used the windward passage, was corrosive. Fortunately for Murdoch, he had made friends with a married man who seemed to love and honour his wife. Once in a while they talked about the mystery of sexual relations, and Ned's point of view was a relief, a sweet salve on the rapacious appetites the other loggers revealed.

Murdoch left the camp and moved to Toronto, where he met and fell in love with Elizabeth Milner. She had soon softened his views of women and begun what she laughingly called his new education. She was a fervent New Woman, as they were referred to, sometimes with a scorn that masked fear. Although Eliza insisted on remaining chaste until her marriage day, she made no attempt to hide her own desires. "We will be partners in this, William Murdoch," she had said many times. He sighed. He never failed to feel the pain of her loss. He shifted to better study Enid's face. She was darker complexioned than Eliza, her jaw wider, her lips fuller, an attractive face but not beautiful.

Enid opened her eyes and looked directly at him. "You're very silent, William Murdoch. What is it you're thinking about?"

He glanced away, feeling guilty that he was lying naked beside this woman and pining over another. "I'm sorry, Enid. I was wool-gathering."

She hardly ever mentioned her dead husband, and he wondered at this moment if she had been making her own mental comparisons between him and Murdoch.

"Thank you for a delicious meal, Enid."

She smiled. "I assume you do mean the fish cakes."

He felt himself blush and was glad she wasn't looking at him. He laughed, realising his own double entendre. "Yes, of course."

In fact, he had found it difficult to finish the dinner she had ready for him. He was so hot with desire, he felt as if he had a fever. He was afraid she would see in his flushed

cheeks and eager eyes what was on his mind and be repulsed. However, she remained affectionate and welcoming. He'd tried to concentrate on eating the mashed potatoes and thought he'd choke.

She'd made a lemon pudding that was too tart for him, but which he pretended to eat with gusto. Then the meal was over, and it was only eight o'clock. Conversation had seemed strained to him, and he blamed himself. Early on, to get it out of the way, he asked her if she was acquainted with a man named Pugh. He gave both versions of Mr. Pugh's appearance and his aptitude for magic, but she denied any knowledge of him. He was glad to believe her. He asked her about her work, and she responded with animation. Her reputation as a fast and efficient typewriter was growing, and she had been getting steady employment. She then asked him to talk about Susanna. "I wish I had known her," she said, and he marvelled that she could say that about a nun. He didn't respond in kind. He wasn't sure if he was eager to meet a family of Baptist, hymn-singing Welshmen. She enquired as to how his investigation was coming along, but it was the last thing he wanted to talk about. "Not well. I'm stumped," was all he could say, and she didn't press him. The clock finally struck nine, the gong dying away on the air, echoing in the silence that had fallen between them. He got up and moved to the couch where she was sitting and took her in his arms, kissing her slowly at first then not so slowly. Finally, she moved back from him.

"I think we should go to my room where we will be more comfortable," she whispered against his cheek. And they had, she accepting his ardour. Even remembering it made him stir.

Now she was the one who was doing the scrutinising.

"What? Am I that strange a country, so different from Wales?"

"Yes, sometimes. Your eyes are very dark, and I can no more see into them than I could see the bottom of the

mountain caches. When we were children we were allowed to swim in them, and the surface was sun warmed; but just below the surface, it was icy cold.” “Oh dear, that is not a flattering image.” “All the water needed was a longer time in the sunshine.”

He kissed her then, tracing the line of her neck lightly with his fingertips, just above the swell of her full breasts. “Your skin is so smooth and soft, as if you have been dipped in velvet.”

With a sigh of pleasure, she closed her eyes again. He continued his exploration, moving his fingers downwards. He felt like a sculptor determining the skeletal underpinnings of the flesh. Here the bony front breastplate; here the curve of the ribs. He had to press a little harder to feel them through the covering of flesh, but he was careful to avoid the pendulous breasts. He was saving them for later. He retraced his path back to her neck, proceeding along the right collarbone to the shoulder joint.

“What are you doing, exactly?” she murmured. They were both speaking quietly, mindful of Alwyn who was asleep in his box room.

“I am getting to know your body. What if all the candles were blown out, and I had to find you among all the other bodies ...”

She opened her eyes. “What other bodies? Is it in a seraglio, we are?”

“Heavens no. Much too crowded.”

“Continue then.”

Before he could do so, the door opened. “Momma!”

Alwyn, eyes wide with total dismay, stood in the doorway staring at them.

Murdoch rolled onto his back immediately, pulling up the sheet. Enid said something in Welsh to the boy, who responded with a spate of words that Murdoch didn’t understand but whose import he sensed unequivocally.

Enid spoke again, and Alwyn reluctantly turned his back to them. She jumped out of bed and put on her dressing robe.

"He isn't feeling well," she said to Murdoch.

She went over to the boy and put her hand on his forehead. "You're hot," she said in English. He replied in Welsh. Enid shook her head.

"Mr. Murdoch was tired, and I offered him a bed for the night. Now remember your manners and come and say hello to him."

Sullenly, Alwyn allowed his mother to lead him to the bed.

"Hello, young man," said Murdoch, who was having a difficult time suppressing his laughter.

"Good evening, Mr. Murdoch. I am not feeling well."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"Come, Alwyn. Back to your bed."

His eyes filled with tears and he started to wail, again talking to his mother in their own language, effectively excluding Murdoch. Enid took the boy in her arms and comforted him.

"I'm afraid he's too upset. He does feel a little feverish," she said to Murdoch.

"Does that mean he is not going to go back to his own room?"

She looked abashed. "When he has these fevers, he doesn't sleep."

"Which means in this bed and not his."

"I'm sorry, Will. It is just that he is used to having me all to himself."

Alwyn was watching Murdoch through tear-laden eyes. His distress was genuine, and Murdoch was torn between feeling completely aggravated at the boy and understanding how threatened he must feel.

"It was time for me to leave anyway. Alwyn, bring me my trousers from the chair."

The boy did so, Enid hovering anxiously nearby. She handed Murdoch his other clothes, indicating he should get

dressed behind the screen.

When he emerged, Alwyn was already in the bed, sitting high on the pillows while his mother stroked his head. Murdoch grimaced. He had the sense he was not the first man in history to witness the bond that exists between mother and son and to feel excluded by it.

Chapter Forty-five

THE STREET WAS DESERTED , and the pavement was black and slick in the light of the street lamps. On impulse, Murdoch headed up to Gerrard Street to the jail. He'd gone there earlier from the Manchester, but the guard had refused to admit him.

"No visiting after six." Murdoch hadn't met this guard before. He contemplated making a fuss but decided against it. Frankly, he didn't know what he could bring to tell Harry. That Delaney wasn't such a saintly fellow? That wouldn't surprise Harry. His own encounter with Mrs. Bowling and the innkeeper's confession were still to be assessed in his mind. At this stage he didn't want to reveal anything to Harry that would raise unjustified hopes.

The two cell wings were in darkness and only a single gas scone sputtered in the entranceway. He wondered if his father was lying awake on the hard cot, afraid to lose what little time was left to him.

Murdoch wasn't sure how long he stood outside the jail, but suddenly he realised his teeth were starting to chatter. He turned away and headed for home. He wasn't quite as lighthearted as he'd been yesterday, the boy's interruption had seen to that, but there was still a glow of warmth around his heart that made him impervious to the biting cold wind that was souging in the trees. He'd been carrying on about the major impediment between him and Enid being their different faiths, but now he was beginning to wonder if it wouldn't rest more in the presence of an intensely jealous boy. Murdoch smiled to himself. Poor Sprat. He could hardly blame him. He vowed he'd try to do more to

win him over. Every lad needed a father. And that thought brought with it such a pang it was as if he had breathed the cold air into his soul.

He was hurrying along Wilton Street as if he were going to work. He was late because he hadn't been able to find his collar. Hastily, he wrapped a scarf around his bare neck, hoping that the inspector wouldn't notice. Suddenly, directly in front of him, he saw Eliza. She was moving slowly, looking into shop windows in a way that she never did in real life. He was filled with intense joy, and he ran up to her, calling out, "How could you not tell me you hadn't died?" She shrugged with an indifference that stabbed him to the heart. "I've met somebody else," she said and there was suddenly a man at her side. She had her arm linked through his. He smirked at Murdoch with all the smugness of assured possession. Murdoch's happiness that Eliza was alive turned immediately to a hot rage. "No!" he yelled, but the sound wouldn't come out, and she and her escort turned away and continued their walk. "No!" he screamed, but the cries were still so choked they could not be heard .

Murdoch woke up. He couldn't tell if he had been actually shouting out loud or not. A pale strip of daylight was showing beneath his window blind. He looked at his alarm clock. Ten minutes past seven. He was surprised he had slept as long as he had. He listened. From the back room downstairs, he heard Arthur coughing, and he gauged the severity of the sound. Bad. The cold, damp air was hard on him. He could hear Beatrice talking. Her voice was, as usual, calm and reassuring. She never for a moment conveyed despair, and ever since Murdoch had been living with them, she had not given up hope of finding some treatment that would bring about a cure. He thought Arthur would have

died many months ago if she had not been ministering to him.

His room had grown cold in the night; and although he was warm underneath the quilt, he wanted to get away from the misery of his dream. He got out of bed and dressed as fast as he could, wondering if Enid was awake and, if she was, what was she doing?

He went downstairs and headed for the kitchen. Beatrice came out carrying a tray. There was a delicious smell of frying bacon in the air.

"Good morning, Mr. Murdoch. I've just started your breakfast."

"Thank you. Here let me take that."

She relinquished the tray. The jug of cream and a bowl of eggs was Arthur's breakfast. This was a reputed cure that he had been taking for some time now. Six fresh eggs stirred into a glass of milk with its heavy cream. Beatrice indicated a small brown bottle.

"We're going to try this as well. It's iodine I got from the chemist. Mrs. O'Grady said she's heard it works wonders."

She opened the door to what was essentially both bedroom and sitting room for the Kitchens. The front small parlour was converted into a dining room for her lodgers. Once again, that meant only Murdoch now that Mrs. Jones had moved out. He knew that most nights Beatrice made up a cot in the kitchen for herself, but by morning it had been tidied away.

The smell from the disinfectant bucket filled the room, which was very cold. The window was kept open so that Arthur could get fresh air.

He was propped up in his Bath chair, wrapped in a blanket. He wore a nightcap and today gloves against the cold.

"Ah, good morning, Will. Welcome to Siberia."

"What? It's positively sweltering in here."

It was a feeble attempt at humour, but he was rewarded by Arthur's grin.

"You must be burning up yourself then if you think that. There's something going about called Welsh fever. Quite debilitating. You'd better watch out." He glanced at Murdoch with a sly look.

"Now, Arthur! Don't tease," said Beatrice, but she, too, smiled expectantly.

"If there is such a thing, I must say, it has not affected Mrs. Jones, who is in excellent health."

"I'm glad of that. Here you go, Arthur."

She poured out the cream, added the raw eggs, then dripped some of the iodine into the glass.

Arthur drank the mixture down in a few big gulps. It was the only way to do it.

His face was grey this morning, and the skin was stretched tightly across his cheekbones. The receding flesh was making his teeth prominent, and the shape of his skull was coming through more and more visibly. He coughed uncontrollably, and Beatrice reached for a fresh strip of linen from the bedside table. He spat into it and she quickly dropped the bloodied cloth into the bucket.

Arthur lay back on his pillow. His chest was heaving as he tried to breathe. Beatrice calmly took his hand in hers.

"I'm just going to start Mr. Murdoch's breakfast. I'll ..." She was interrupted by the sound of knocking at the front door. "That's probably the bread man. He's coming earlier and earlier."

"I'll see to it," said Murdoch.

The truth was that he was only too glad to get out of the room. Sometimes he found the sight of Arthur's struggle almost unbearable. It was like being forced to watch a man drown while you were a mere two feet away on the shore but unable to do anything about it.

The rapping sounded again, and he opened the door with some irritation. On the threshold was standing a constable,

whose enormous bulk filled the doorway. It was his fellow officer, George Crabtree.

"George! What are you doing here at this hour?"

"Good morning, Mr. Murdoch. I'm sorry to intrude at a time like this and so early in the morning, but Inspector Brackenreid would like you to come down to the station on a rather urgent matter."

"What urgent matter?"

"I'm afraid he didn't say, sir. He just asked me to fetch you right away."

"Do I have time for my breakfast?"

"I rather doubt that, Mr. Murdoch. He said he wanted to see you in his office in fifteen minutes."

"Well, we'd better hurry then. I'd hate to disappoint our good inspector. He clearly has a high opinion of our abilities to get from the station and back in that amount of time. Let me tell Mrs. Kitchen."

Murdoch turned around but his landlady had come out into the hall, and he explained the summons.

"No lodger of mine is going out on a cold morning like this without a bite of breakfast in his stomach. You can wait for one minute at least."

She went back to the kitchen.

Murdoch, in the meantime, started to put on his coat and hat. "Any guesses as to what he wants, George?"

"Apparently he had an early visitor. I was in the back room and didn't see him arrive, but he was in the office when I went up to answer the bell. The inspector didn't say who he was or why you were being summoned at this sorrowful time, but the man must have something to do with it."

Mrs. Kitchen returned with a sandwich wrapped in grease-proof paper and handed it to Murdoch.

He thanked her, put it in his pocket, and left with Crabtree. Once outside, they started a fast jogging trot up the street.

"What did the fellow look like?"

"I didn't really get a look at him. He was standing with his back to me and was looking out of the window."

"Tall? Short? Fat?"

"Sorry, Mr. Murdoch, it was such a glimpse. I'd say he was quite slim and on the short side."

"By ordinary standards, George, or compared to you?"

Crabtree grinned. "Ordinary standards."

They were at the station. The lamps shone into the grey morning, and Murdoch felt the familiar pleasurable response to the sight. He realised he would be glad to get back to work.

"Just a minute, George. Let me get my breath. I don't want the inspector to have the satisfaction of seeing me panting. He might get an inflated sense of his own importance."

He would have liked to have taken a bite of his sandwich, but he knew it was going to be greasy, and he didn't want to see Brackenreid with bacon fat smeared all over his face.

"All right, Constable Crabtree. Let us face Caesar."

They went into the station where Sergeant Seymour, the soberfaced desk sergeant, greeted him. "He's waiting for you," he said with a grimace, indicating Brackenreid was in a mood. Not unusual, but depending on its severity, there was always the hazard that the station would be rocked back on its heels with his unreasonable demands and the laying out of fines and charges for petty misdemeanours.

"Give me your sandwich, I'll keep it warm, and I'll mash some tea," said Crabtree. "Come and have some when you're done."

"Hold on a minute. There's a package come for you," said Seymour. He reached under his desk. "Strange fellow brought it in. A priest of some kind; couldn't even speak English properly."

Curious, Murdoch examined the parcel. On the front was the convent's insignia.

"Hold on to it for me. If I don't return, I've willed all my effects to my landlady."

He hung his coat and hat on one of the hooks on the wall and went upstairs to the inspector's second-floor office. There was a serviceable rush carpet on the stairs, but outside the door there was a strip of luxurious Axminster carpet. Even though the station was in need of repairs, Brackenreid refused to acknowledge it and spent money on furnishings that enhanced his own position.

Murdoch knocked on the door. He could feel his pulse was faster. What the hell was the reason for this urgency?

"Come!"

He entered the room. Brackenreid was seated behind his desk, and his visitor was seated in the sole easy chair in front of him. In what seemed to Murdoch a staged effect, the man was holding a newspaper in front of his face. The air was blue and pungent with cigar smoke. It could have been a gentleman's club rather than a police inspector's office.

"You asked to see me, sir," said Murdoch.

Brackenreid drew on his cigar before answering. He waved his hand in the direction of the other man.

"You know Mr. Pugh, I understand."

Chapter Forty-six

MURDOCH COULDN'T SAY he was really surprised. Once he was confident that Pugh was not Enid's suitor, he suspected the man was also doing a little investigating of his own. He assumed he was a genuine reporter getting ready to write something sensational when Harry was hung.

"Good morning to you, Mr. Murdoch. No hard feelings, I hope?"

"About what?" asked Brackenreid.

"A little contest that Mr. Murdoch and I engaged in. I assure you, sir, the secret is all a matter of physics. I use your weight against you by actually pushing downward on the stick."

"I for one have no idea what you're talking about, Mr. Pugh, but let's get to the matter at hand, shall we?" He scowled at Murdoch as if he were the one meandering. Scowling at Murdoch, however, was his typical expression.

"I sent for you because Mr. Pugh here has brought a most grave matter to my attention." He brushed some ash from the front of his jacket. "I realise that you are, er, under some duress as it were, but I felt nevertheless it was imperative we clarify some things. You have been trespassing, Murdoch, and I'd like to know why."

"I do not know what you are referring to, Inspector."

Whether it was Murdoch's tone of voice or memories of previous encounters, Brackenreid seemed to think it prudent to turn toward Pugh.

"Perhaps you could explain."

"Certainly. Mr. Murdoch, I have to confess I have not been altogether honest with you." He grinned. "But then we were

both masquerading under false pretenses, weren't we, Mr. Williams?"

Murdoch nodded, waiting. Pugh cleared his throat. "Yes, well, the point is, you see, that I am not a book salesman as I have been pretending to be. Like you, I am a detective, a private one with the Hoskin Agency. You may have heard of us?"

"Yes, I have."

Murdoch did not add that much of what he had heard had not enhanced the agency's reputation.

Pugh took a leather folder from his jacket pocket and removed two bills.

"Mr. Murdoch, take a look at these two-dollar notes. One is genuine; one is counterfeit. Can you tell me which is which?" He held them in front of him, ever the showman.

Murdoch moved closer. The bills both had portraits of the Marquis and Marchioness of Lansdowne on the front, and both were creased and grubby. He chose the dirtier one.

"This one is counterfeit."

Pugh couldn't quite hide his chagrin. "Yes, well done. But you must admit you had to study them carefully. It was not immediately obvious that it is a forgery. In the normal business of commerce, it would pass unnoticed. They are the work of truly expert engravers." He replaced the notes in the folder. "For the past year, I have been employed by Mr. Cockburn of the Dominion Bank. They have become aware of a steady increase of counterfeit money, all two-dollar bills, circulating in the city. As you can imagine, it is a very difficult task to trace the source of queer money as it can pass through literally a dozen hands before being detected. However, I have finally discovered what I believe has been a primary source of distribution. In other words the engravers themselves. I was on the verge of making an arrest when my birds were flushed. Phit! Scared away by a wily fox who was poaching on my land, as it were. All my work for nought."

Again he paused, his cigar held aloft. Murdoch shrugged.

"Mr. Pugh, you are an excellent magician, but perhaps it has affected your ability to be direct. I do not know what in Hades you are talking about."

Pugh smiled, not offended by these hot words. "Quite right, Mr. Murdoch. Circumlocution becomes ingrained. To the point then. What I want to say is that this summer past I had narrowed down my search. I won't bore you with the details of how I followed my trail; suffice it to say I ended up at the Manchester tavern...."

"That's ridiculous."

"Why so, Mr. Murdoch?"

"Vince Newcombe is no queer pusher."

"I must admit he does appear to be a jolly, well-meaning sort of fellow, but come sir, as a police officer you know how money can tempt the most honourable men to mischief."

"Where would he print them? Unless it's remarkably well hidden, he doesn't have a press."

"You race ahead of me, sir."

Brackenreid interrupted. "Let him tell his story, Murdoch. You'd do well to listen closely."

Murdoch would have liked to have sat down. While the other two were seated, he felt like a naughty schoolboy being reprimanded. Pugh must have become aware of this discomfort because he stood up and walked over to the window. Leaning against the sill, he drew on his cigar.

"I will admit for a while I did not know if the bills were coming from his tavern because of the turnover of money that takes place there, or if he was more directly responsible. Mr. Newcombe, as you are aware, on occasion runs betting matches. He pretends they are friendly contests for sport only, but of course that is not the case. Money is wagered, and therefore many notes are passed among the Fancy. In August I got myself a dog so I could participate in the match, and I made a careful record of what money was passed along by what person. As it turned

out, my suspicions were quite justified. Delaney had in his possession eleven two-dollar bills of which eight were queer."

He turned around but his back was to the light, throwing him into shadow so that his expression was inscrutable.

"Not counting myself, only two other people had passed along bills of two-dollar denomination. I had marked all the money I myself exchanged, so it was a simple matter to determine where the false currency had come from."

He couldn't resist a short pause before his denouement. Murdoch did not accommodate him and kept his expression indifferent.

Pugh continued. "In a word, James Craig contributed five bills and his father three. All were counterfeit. As you may know, the Craigs make their living publishing pamphlets and broadsheets. They therefore had access to a printing press. I kept them under close observation from that time on and soon determined that the appearance of queer money seemed to coincide with father and son working late hours in their printing shed. Yes, Mr. Murdoch, I know what you are going to say. Not proof enough by any means. I needed to catch them red-handed with the engraving plates in their possession. Then I could make an arrest. A big feather in my cap, as I'm sure you can understand. However, before I could proceed any further, they were scared off. Poof! Gone! Miss Craig will not or cannot give any indication of their whereabouts."

He returned to his seat. "I discovered that you, sir, were neither a reporter nor another private detective but an officer from this station. My guess is that the Craigs also got wind that you were a police detective and went into hiding because they assumed you were onto them."

"What the hell have you been doing, Murdoch?" interjected Brackenreid. "You are supposed to be on compassionate leave, not chasing around the country, poaching."

"I was not poaching, as you call it, sir. I have had no inkling of what Mr. Pugh is pursuing. I did accidentally encounter the Craig lad, however. He has been up before the magistrate before. He called himself Carey then and he was in court on a charge of seduction. I was in the courtroom that day. I didn't think he recognised me, but he must have."

"How unfortunate. Actually, Murdoch, Mr. Pugh here is offering to do us, this station, a favour. He feels he is not ready to make an arrest, and he does not want to reveal his incognito." He turned to Pugh. "You believe that Miss Craig is becoming quite attached to you, and you wish to cultivate that friendship, isn't that so?"

Pugh nodded, rather shamefaced.

"He has done all the hard work, and we can just capitalise on it. Suit both of us. We'll get some much-needed public approval, and Mr. Pugh here will receive his just wages."

"I am not sure what you are implying, sir," said Murdoch.

"Quite simple. Mr. Pugh is proposing we search the Craig house. If we find the engraving plates, we take credit. If we don't, Mr. Pugh is still not unmasked and can go on with his investigation."

Brackenreid opened his drawer and took out some notepaper. "I'm going to draw up an order. The sooner you get on to it the better."

He started to scrawl on the page. Pugh remained at the window.

"By the way, Murdoch," said the inspector, "if you weren't barging in where you shouldn't, what *were* you doing? Why did you give out a false name? Mr. Pugh said you were pretending to be some kind of reporter."

Before Murdoch could answer, Pugh jumped in. The mood between them had changed quite suddenly. Pugh was no longer behaving as if they were competitors in the race for the golden apples thrown down by the Dominion Bank. In fact, he now seemed anxious to end the interview.

“Inspector Brackenreid, I am quite satisfied that Mr. Murdoch was not following the same trail after all. I can quite understand his circumstances. We can let it rest.”

Murdoch sensed how fidgety the other man had become, and with a sense of shock, he realised why. He actually took a step in Pugh’s direction.

“You took money off Delaney’s body, didn’t you?”

“I beg pardon, sir.”

“There was money missing, part of his winnings: twenty-two dollars. You took them when you found his body.”

“Murdoch, what’s the matter with you? What are you blethering about?” spluttered Brackenreid.

Murdoch whirled around. “You asked what I was up to, sir. Well, I was conducting an investigation of my own. I wanted to make absolutely sure that my father was guilty of the crime he is to hang for.”

“Good Lord, Murdoch. Have you lost your mind? What are you talking about?”

“Didn’t Mr. Pugh tell you? My father, Harry Murdoch, was convicted of killing John Delaney directly after the betting match Pugh referred to. He is due to be hung in two days’ time.” He turned round to face Pugh, who backed off a few steps. “The fact that money was missing was used to support the guilty charge against Harry. It was assumed he had stolen it. Yet another nail in his coffin. Why didn’t you come forward and say that was not the case? That you had taken it?”

Pugh looked down at his boots. “It wasn’t relevant.”

“I’m tired of people saying that. Isn’t a jury supposed to decide what is or is not relevant? Isn’t that what our bloody justice system is all about?”

“Now, now, Murdoch,” said Brackenreid, “calm yourself. Please realise this is the first time I have heard of your situation. It is most unusual to say the least.”

“I realise that, sir. But this man here actually withheld information that might have made a difference to the

outcome of the trial.”

Brackenreid could be an irascible Napoleon of a man, but he retained some pride in his job as a police officer. He frowned now at Pugh.

“Is this true, sir? What Mr. Murdoch is accusing you of?”

“I assure you, I answered honestly the questions put to me at the trial.” Pugh tried to meet Murdoch’s eyes with only partial success. “I am sorry for your situation, but your father bashed Delaney and that’s the truth.”

“Is it? Are you God, Mr. Pugh, as well as a magician? Can you see into his heart with such certainty?”

“Please contain yourself, Murdoch. Mr. Pugh, is it true that you removed money from the body of this Mr. Delaney?”

Pugh shrugged and, for the first time, his jovial entertainer’s mask slipped. “Inspector, I have been pursuing this investigation for more than a year. I have spent untold hours on this case. I needed to check on those bills. I had no idea that it would come up at the trial.”

“But when it did, you said nothing.”

“Mr. Murdoch is understandably overwrought, but I tell you sincerely the matter of the missing money was small compared to the rest of the evidence, which was quite conclusive.”

“Nevertheless, we must in conscience bring this to the attention of the court.”

“If you do, we stand to lose every advantage we have.”

Brackenreid leaned back in his chair. “I believe you mean that you yourself will lose the advantage.”

“Will you deny me the search then?”

“Counterfeiting is a serious crime. I have every intention of following up on the information you have given me. However, this other matter must take precedence.”

Murdoch could hardly believe what he was hearing. If he’d had a different relationship with his inspector, he would have jumped forward at that moment and shaken his hand.

Brackenreid actually gave him a kind look. "Mr. Murdoch, I suggest you go at once and apprise the warden of this meeting. I will myself come over directly and speak to him in person. Mr. Pugh, if you would be so good as to remain here, I would like to hear from you the events of that evening. I will write it down."

Pugh looked as if he were contemplating doing a bunk, but he thought better of it. He reached into his pocket and casually brought out a silver dollar and began to twist it through his fingers.

"Of course, Inspector."

"Thank you, sir," said Murdoch, and not trusting himself to stay near Pugh any longer, he left and hurried down to the station hall.

Seymour saw the expression on his face. "Will, what happened? You're white as a ghost."

Murdoch could hear himself panting as if he'd run a long distance. "I can't tell you right now."

He started to head for the door when the sergeant called to him.

"Hold on a minute. You've forgotten your package."

He hurried around the desk and handed it over to Murdoch.

"Will ...," he started to say, but Murdoch took the parcel, grabbed his coat from the rack, and practically ran. With a desperation he could hardly bear, he knew he needed to speak to his father.

Chapter Forty-seven

JESSICA PUT HER TWO COPPER POTS in the wooden crate; then she took the top one out again. She'd need it to heat up milk for Sally. The child loved to have her "possy," a mug of hot milk sweetened with honey. Jessica glanced over to the hearth where the child was seated on the floor. She had placed her favourite doll, Min-min, in a box for her bed. She was talking quietly to herself, but Jessica heard her say, "Go to sleep like a good girl. Don't bother Momma. Momma has a heartache."

Last week Sally had asked her mother what was wrong, why she lay in bed sleeping all the time. "Momma has a heartache," Jess had replied, and now Sally said that all the time. She had bound a piece of cloth about the doll's head, confusing head and heartaches. Jessica wanted to go to her and hug her tightly, but she felt as if she could hardly move, as if her limbs were too heavy. She simply stood and watched for a moment; then she went back to her task. She had packed the three valises, which was all Walter would allow.

"Only what we can carry, Jess. Put everything else you'll need later in the trunks. I'll get some crates, and you can put the dishes and your pots in them."

She blinked. She had been standing at the sink staring through the window but seeing nothing. How long? There was a plate in her hand that she had been in the process of wrapping in the strips of Holland cloth that Walter had cut for her. These dishes had come to her from her own mother when she'd died. Her older sister, Catherine, had been angry at that, considering it was more her right as she had

nursed their mother in the last days of her illness. "You can have them," Jessica had said, but her sister had pouted and retreated into martyrdom. "No, if that was her wish, you must have them," but after that the feelings between them were even less cordial than they had been. Jessica knew that she had been her mother's favourite child, the last born, the youngest daughter. She hadn't wanted to move away, but Walter was always restless and, she suspected, all too anxious to move her far from her family, where he'd have her all to himself. So they had moved to Ontario and taken this cottage in which she had once taken such delight.

She couldn't return to Alberta, not with Catherine's coldness and constant reproach, and yesterday, when Walter had suggested they move further east, she had agreed. Not with enthusiasm or even fear; she had no strong feelings anymore. They were soaked up like ink on blotting paper by her prevailing lethargy, her indifference to any event around her, even her own child.

The door opened and Walter came in, bringing a waft of cold air. He couldn't hide his dismay when he saw her.

"Jess! Not done yet? We don't have much more time."

She looked around, saw the half-empty crate, the pots on the floor. The stack of dishes, already wrapped, were still on the table.

"Here, I can help now," he said.

Sally jumped up and ran over to him. She was sucking her thumb, the doll tucked under her arm.

"Arh. That's dirty," he said, and pulled the thumb away from her mouth. She started to whine.

"Leave her alone, Walter. She'll just get upset again, and she's been playing nicely."

Sally was winding up for a full crying jag. Jessica picked up a dish where a honeycomb sat in a sticky mess. Flies never completely died off, and one or two were crawling around the dish. Jessica knocked them away, broke off a piece of

the comb, and handed it to Sally. The child quieted immediately, stuffing the sweet morsel into her mouth.

"Go and play with Min-min for a bit longer, there's my girl."

Sally cast a sullen look mixed with some triumph at her father, and he sighed in exasperation.

He began to place the dishes in the crate, where he'd put wood shavings.

"Maria has agreed to keep an eye on things until I have a chance to come back for our belongings."

"Did she have anything to say?"

"No, not really." He hesitated for a moment. "I told her your sister had invited you to come and live with her for a while until you felt more like yourself."

"Catherine has virtually disowned me."

"Maria doesn't know that, Jess." He tried to keep the impatience out of his voice, but she felt it and turned away from him. She looked out of the window.

"It's starting to snow," she said.

"Yes, it's gone very cold. It will be warmer where we're going," he answered, struggling to inject jollity into his tone.

She didn't turn around, and her voice was so low he almost didn't catch what she said.

"Are you certain we are doing the right thing, Walter?"

He stood up and came over to her and put his arms around her, burying his head in her shoulder. "Of course we are, my chuck. We'll have a new start. No bad memories. You'll see. Before you know it you'll be feeling right as rain."

Briefly she rested her cheek against the top of his head. "Will I? Sometimes I feel as if I will never be happy again. Not as long as I live."

"Jess, come on. You have Sally. We'll have sons, seven of them if I have anything to do with it."

He moved his hands to her breasts, caressing them through her gown. She flinched and he could feel her body stiffen. He let her go and stepped back.

"I'd better get on with this packing. Are you going to help or not?"

Without looking at him, she walked over to the door and reached for her shawl. "I'm feeling so tired. I think some air will wake me up."

"Jess ..."

"Watch Sally, will you. I won't be long."

"Momma!" Seeing what her mother was doing, Sally let out a wail and ran toward her. Walter caught hold of her.

"Sally, stop it. Momma will be back. She's going for a walk. You can help me."

"No! I want to go, too. Me, too."

Jessica closed the door behind her, almost running toward the gate. She could hear the frightened screams of her little daughter, but she pulled the shawl tighter about her head to shut out the sound. She didn't know where she was going, only that she couldn't bear to be in his presence. The pretence between them was like acid in her gut. It wasn't only the loss of her unborn son that was destroying her life energy, it was the circumstances that had caused the miscarriage, circumstances they had never referred to again so that she thought she would go mad, as if she had swallowed poison that she must vomit up if she were to live.

She was sliding down the hill now, the snow and mud over her boots cold against her bare legs. She came to a halt by catching hold of one of the trees. She clung to it, pressing her cheek against the rough bark. She began to cry out over and over. "You lied to me. I know you did. You lied."

The skin on her face began to bleed.

Chapter Forty-eight

THE GUARD UNLOCKED THE DOOR and let him into the hall.

"Is the warden available? I need to talk to him on a matter of some urgency."

"He's not here. He's gone over to Central Prison to talk to the warden there, see if he can get some tips on how to run a jail."

He grinned, inviting Murdoch to share the joke. However, he was in no mood for humour.

"When will he be back?"

"Shouldn't be much more than an hour." He regarded Murdoch with curiosity. "Do you want to see the prisoner today?"

Murdoch nodded.

"He's with the priest, confessing or whatever it is they do. Be about half an hour. Do you want me to fetch him anyway?"

"No, that's all right. I'll wait."

He followed the guard into the waiting room.

"Here you go. Make yourself comfortable. Warden Massie's given orders you can stay as long as you like, seeing it's ..."

His voice tailed off. He meant seeing it might be the last time Murdoch would see his father alive.

Tyler went out through the opposite door that led to the cells, and Murdoch sat down at the table. The clock on the wall gave an asthmatic whirr. It wasn't yet eleven o'clock. He propped his elbows on the table and leaned his head in his hands. He was almost surprised to find his forehead was cool. When he was about ten years old, Murdoch had come

down with scarlet fever. He had a vivid memory of being sent home from school and how odd everything round him had seemed; colours were stronger, sounds louder. There had been a bad storm the day before, and as he walked along the shore to his house, he saw that the landscape had altered. A dock had been knocked askew and sand had buried some rocks and been blown away from others. In his feverish state, he tried to make himself understand this, but he couldn't. All he knew was a feeling of dislocation and strangeness.

Even though he had no actual physical illness right at this moment, he had the same peculiar sense of abnormality. The words "relevant" and "irrelevant" were buzzing in his brain like flies in a jar. It wasn't that good men didn't get murdered, they did. However, Newcombe's revelations about John Delaney's character could change the picture. Murdoch grimaced. Suddenly the circle of suspects had widened. There was really quite a queue if he looked at it like that. What if Delaney's wife had taken exception to his behaviour? Or his son or his daughter? Or Mrs. Bowling? Or somebody he didn't even know about yet who had been affected by Delaney's lasciviousness. The news about the Craigs and their sideline also muddied the pond considerably. What if Delaney had found out and was trying a spot of blackmail or even righteously was about to report them? Easy to get a daughter to lie in court, and give them an alibi, especially as she, too, would be affected by the discovery. *Relevant? Irrelevant?* Buzz, buzz.

The problem was one of time. He needed much more time to pursue these possibilities, and he had no certainty he would get it. For Massie to postpone the execution, he would have to be convinced there was sufficient doubt concerning Harry's culpability now being raised. Was there?

The waiting room was hot, the oil heater blasting out warm air, and he removed his coat. He'd almost forgotten about the package Sergeant Seymour had handed to him.

More for something to do than anything else, he took it out of his pocket and tore open the brown paper wrapping. Inside was a diary. He smiled, recognising it, a birthday present he'd given to his sister when they were young. He opened up the cover, which was lavishly embossed with gold flowers on a background of red velvet. He'd agonised over the choice, he remembered, finally settling on this showy book.

Printed in a big, childish hand that tended to slope off the page, was the first entry. She hadn't got enough command of her penmanship yet, and this one entry took up three pages. He had helped her with the spelling, but it seemed as if he hadn't been that good either.

December 12 the year of Our Lord 1872

Today I am eight years old. I got this writing tablet from

William Murdoch, my brother. I have a brother named

Albert. He is one year yunger than me and he is simpul.

My mamma gave me a blue riban for my hair.

Murdoch touched the page with his fingertips. Susanna had loved pretty things, not that she received many.

He continued reading.

January 10 in the year of Our Lord 1873

My poppa wos angry with Bertie. He is also angry with

Will. He is not as angry with me because I am a girl but momma loves us all more.

Sunday. We all went to mass and Father Maloney blessed us. Poppa did not go. Bertie was a good boy.

He turned the page and there was one solitary entry on the next page that stopped his heart for a moment.

March 12

Momma has gone to heaven.

He had been helping Mr. Mitchell in his dry goods store that afternoon. He'd been laying down fresh sawdust on the floor, and for years after, he couldn't smell that odour without remembering that day. There were only two short entries in the following pages, both about going to church again. Then another laborious record.

November 28. 1873

Bertie, my brother, has been taken by Jesus. His hart was broken.

Again Murdoch touched the page. After their mother's death, Bertie had withdrawn into a world of his own. He didn't laugh, and no matter what he and Susanna tried, he wouldn't play with them anymore. That particular morning he had complained of hurting in his chest, but nobody had taken him seriously because he was always moaning about some kind of ache or pain, which they dismissed as his bid for attention. Harry had gone off to his boat, Will to school, and Susanna was left to tend to the house and get the evening meal. When Will came home, the neighbour from down the road was in the living room, sitting beside the couch bathing Bertie's face. Susanna had fetched her because Bertie had collapsed, and she couldn't rouse him. Murdoch had taken over the ministrations, but they had been futile. Eventually, the doctor came from the village, but he said Bertie had suffered a heart seizure. It was common for children like him to have bad hearts, he'd said, in a hateful pedantic voice. "There wasn't anything anyone could do," he said, and Bertie obliged by dying at that moment in front of all of them. A little gasp, a sigh, and he was gone.

The memory was still painful. Murdoch had loved his brother even though he was often exasperated with him when he couldn't do what seemed like simple ordinary tasks. However, his father seemed to hate him from the moment it became apparent Bertie was not normal, as if

that reflected on his prowess as a man. He never acknowledged him as his son and frequently beat him unmercifully for small mistakes. Murdoch intervened as often as he could and got the brunt of the anger drawn onto himself.

The clock wheezed again. Quarter past eleven. He wondered if he should read the rest of the diary later. The memories it was stirring were hot. He didn't particularly want to colour these last moments with his father, especially after what had happened at their last visit. Perhaps he should let sleeping dogs lie. However, he couldn't resist, and he continued to read.

December 1873

Will and me are now living with our Aunt Emily Weldon who is momma's sister. She is strict. Her house is pretty. We have been here one week. After Bertie was taken to Jesus, Poppa was angry a lot. He was cruel to Will. Then Will got me up in the middle of the night. It was very dark. It took us a long time to walk to the station. Will had to tell a white lie to the ticket man but he let us buy a ticket. He was kind and gave me a sticky bun with currants in it. Aunt Weldon was surprised to see us. I was afraid she would send us to a Home but Will talked to her. He had to show her his arm which is bad where Poppa hit him. He has promised to work hard. I will lern to sew.

Murdoch touched his left forearm. The scar that ran from his elbow to wrist was jagged and long. The next entry one year later showed much improved handwriting and didn't take up as much space.

December 12, 1874

I am ten years old today. Aunt gave me a picture of Jesus who is my Savyour. Will gave me a new nib for my pen.

They had stayed with their aunt for the next four years. Those were not especially happy times. His aunt was a schoolteacher at the one-room schoolhouse just outside St.

John's. She had not wanted two young children to look after. She was poorly paid, and it must have been a hardship for her to raise them. A few months after they arrived, she had received a letter from their father enquiring as to their whereabouts. She had decided then that she would not send them back, and that moment was one of the few times of warmth he had experienced from her. Now he could see that she had loved them both as much as she was capable of, but then he didn't feel it, only constant criticism and carping. Harry had not pursued the matter, and Murdoch had not seen him again or heard anything from him until now.

He began to skim through the pages. Susanna wasn't diligent in her diary and only managed one or two entries a year, mostly birthday times. He stopped at the entry for 1878 when Susanna had gone away to the convent school when she was fourteen. Her writing was now very neat, a result of many a knuckle rapping by their aunt.

September 7 '78

I have begun school with the Sisters of St. Ann. I am sharing my room with five other girls. We are all the same age but Emilie is the oldest. She is almost fifteen. I cried when Will left. Aunt Weldon did not come as she was too ill to make the journey. I would have gladly stayed home and taken care of her but she and Will thought this was best as the sisters have a good name. JMJ.

She had drawn a little cross at the top of the page. More scattered entries all about school or references to letters from Will or her aunt. Desperate for some freedom, Murdoch had left their aunt's home and made his way west. He'd had to do odd jobs along the way to earn money for food, and it was a rough, difficult time when he often went hungry. However, he remembered being happy. He was independent for the first time, beginning to feel his own power as a man.

He'd grown tall, and the labouring work had filled out his chest and broadened his shoulders.

The last entry was written on the eve of Susanna becoming a postulant at the Holy Name convent.

Tomorrow I will say goodbye to the world and enter into the haven of this convent. May I be worthy .

He closed the book. He hadn't noticed at first the envelope that was tucked at the back of the diary, addressed to him. He opened it. There were two letters, one a short one from Mother St. Raphael.

Dear Mr. Murdoch. I am sending you these last effects of your sister Susanna Murdoch, known to us in God as Sister Philomena. I cannot express my deep distress and sorrow at the contents of her letter, and I have prayed for many long hours as to whether or not I should send it to you. Obviously my decision was to do so, and the letter is enclosed. I do, however, beg you to keep your heart open to the mercy of Our Lord in whom lies all justice and retribution. If you have a desire to consult with me further, I will make myself available. Yours in God,
Mother St. Raphael

Curious, Murdoch unfolded the second piece of paper.

Chapter Forty-nine

WALTER STOOD STARING OUT OF THE WINDOW , Sally clinging to his leg, whining. Jess had been gone at least an hour. He'd tried to continue packing up some of the household utensils, but it was as if he had been infected by her lethargy, and he moved slowly although they had to catch the train at seven o'clock. He leaned his head against the cold windowpane. The trouble was, it wasn't they who needed to vanish, it was more that they needed to lose the past. He had little confidence the move would make that much difference, but he didn't know what else to do. He hoped that without constant reminders of what had happened, Jess would recover her spirits, that she would come back to him.

"Sally, stop whingeing. You're getting on my nerves."

Of course, his harsh tone only made the child cry louder, and in remorse, he swept her up into his arms.

"All right. It's all right. There, there."

"Where's Momma?"

Walter used his sleeve to wipe the child's tear-stained face.

"Let's go find her, shall we? Maybe she's just playing hide-and-seek with us."

Sally looked doubtful, but he gave her no chance to start up again. He put her back down and went to get her cloak. He really didn't know where Jess could have gone, but it felt better to move than to stay here wondering.

"Go get your boots, Sally."

He spoke to his child in a cheery voice and tried to smile at her, but his stomach was tight with fear. He didn't want to face his own forebodings.

"The frigging bastard." Murdoch smashed his fist on the table. "The rotten frigging bastard."

He hit the table over and over, bruising his hand. Suddenly the door from the cells opened and Barker came in, leading his father.

"What's the matter?" the guard asked.

Murdoch didn't answer him, but he reached in his pocket and took out all the money he had. It wasn't much, less than two dollars. He stood up and walked over to him. Harry was eyeing him warily, but he didn't say anything and went and sat down at the table. Murdoch handed the money to Barker.

"I need to speak in absolute privacy. Will you leave us alone? This is our last chance."

"You're not going to try to spring him, are you?"

"Not at all. You don't have to worry about that."

Barker stared into Murdoch's face, puzzled by what he saw there but not quite understanding.

"All right. Ten minutes but then I have to come and check on you."

Murdoch remembered he had another dollar in his inside pocket, and he fished that out and pushed it into the guard's hand.

"If you make that twenty minutes, I will appreciate it."

"I'll come back then."

He left, closing and locking the door behind him. Harry looked up at Murdoch.

"There's hatred in your face, son. What has happened?"

Murdoch thrust the letter under his nose. "This is from Susanna. She's dead, by the way. I haven't told you yet. She wrote this. Read it."

Harry didn't touch the paper. "When did she die?"

"This last Tuesday. She had a tumour that she wasn't telling anybody about. She wrote me a letter before she

took her final vows, and I have just received it from the prioress. Read it."

Harry shrugged. "You've forgotten I don't know how."

Murdoch grabbed the letter. "Then I'll read it to you ..."

"No! I don't want to hear it. What's done is done and forgotten."

"It's not. It never will be as far as I'm concerned."

Suddenly, Harry got to his feet. "You're just aching for a fight, aren't you?"

"I learned from a master."

"Then you shall have it."

Murdoch saw the blow coming and deflected it with his left forearm. With his right fist he hit his father hard, so that Harry jerked backwards.

"You frigging bastard," said Murdoch, and he hit him again, knocking him to the floor.

Harry lay back. His nose was dribbling blood and snot.

Murdoch came around the table and stood over the fallen man. "Did that jolt your memory? If it didn't, maybe we can continue until it does."

He stared down at his father. So many times he had imagined such a confrontation, but now that it had happened, the triumph was no more than ashes.

Harry took a long time to get to his feet. Murdoch braced himself for the retaliation and he was ready for it, would have welcomed it, but his father merely leaned against the wall, wiping his nose with the back of his sleeve. There was a red mark already appearing on his cheekbone. His flare of anger had evaporated, and he looked defeated.

"I assume you felt you had a good reason to do that." "I do indeed."

"Tell me what your sister wrote. I'd like to know." "Is that so?"

Murdoch's mouth felt sour to him, and he was ashamed of himself for losing his temper like that. He walked around to the other side of the table.

Harry righted the chair and sat down. "I've already told you I'm sorry for my ways. I'd give my right arm if I could go back and change the way I was to all of you, but I can't."

His voice was steady and sincere, but to Murdoch it was like pouring kerosene on a fire.

"Sorry isn't enough, Harry! You can say 'I'm sorry' now that you're about to be strung up, but sorry isn't going to wipe out what you did."

Murdoch's voice was loud, and he glimpsed the curious face of the guard peering through the window, but Barker didn't intervene and went back down the hall.

"Susanna says she was present the afternoon our mother died."

He stared at his father, hoping for some sign of uneasiness, some flash of guilty recognition, but there was none.

Harry leaned forward, his hands on the chair as if his back was sore.

"Why don't you make your point, Will."

"My point! This is not a debate we're having where I make a point and you can make a rebuttal.... Susanna says she saw you hit Momma, and she fell and struck her head on the stove. She was dizzy. You insisted she go to the shore because you couldn't do without your goddamn whelks. Is it coming back to you now, Harry? You do remember how fond you were of your whelks, don't you?"

Harry's nose had stopped bleeding, and he was leaning on his elbows, his head in his hands.

"Well? Is it coming back to you now? She should have gone and lain down, probably should have gone to see Dr. Curtis, but you wouldn't let her. You wanted your dinner nice and fresh."

He saw that Harry was weeping, but he couldn't stop himself.

"Mother didn't have any fight left in her. She obeyed as she always did. She went to the shore, and she slipped on

the rocks because she was dizzy – because you had slapped her across the head. What do you have to say to that, Harry? I'd say that was tantamount to murder, wouldn't you?"

This time there was a reaction from Harry. He drew in his breath sharply. "I ... I would like to deny that ever happened, but if Susanna says that is what she saw then I believe it did. If I could give my right arm to bring Mary back, to beg her forgiveness, I would."

"You've already given your right arm, I'm afraid," jeered Murdoch. "You'd better say your left. And then maybe your legs because in my books Bertie was also a casualty. He died because Momma was gone, and he knew you hated him. He had nothing to live for. Poor, sad, sad Bertie. You should add him to your list of regrets. You didn't directly put a knife in their hearts, but you might as well have."

Harry gave a groan and shook his head for all the world like a tormented bear.

Murdoch went on. "You don't remember, eh? How convenient for you. Just like you don't recall killing John Delaney."

His father's face was twisted with grief. "Maybe this is retribution for what I did do, but surely that is for Our God to decide, not you or even me. I will face Him at the day of judgement, and He will decide if I am worthy of forgiveness or not. Or would you rather take that decision into your own hands?"

Suddenly, Harry seemed grey and frail, as if all of his life force had been drained away. Murdoch felt as if he himself were being torn in two. His own anger subsided, leaving not forgiveness, that was too far away, but a wrenching, unbearable sorrow. His father could weep and regret to the bottom of his soul what he had done, but it would not change what had happened. Both his mother's and brother's lives had been shortened because of this man. He had

blighted them while they were alive, and nothing would make up for that.

The door behind him opened, and the warden entered. He saw Harry's bloodied face.

"Goodness me, what's happened here?"

Harry answered him quickly. "I fell and banged my head, sir."

"Fell how?"

Murdoch interrupted. "The truth is we were fighting. I hit him."

"You were fighting with your own father?"

"Yes, sir. I regret to say I was. I regret, not because we are related by blood, but because I am younger and fitter and it was an unequal fight."

Massie looked from one to the other and then at the opposite door. "Where is Barker?"

As if on cue, the guard's face peered in through the window. Seeing the warden, he came into the room immediately.

"Mr. Barker, please take Mr. Murdoch back to his cell. And tend to that bruise on his cheek. I don't want the clergy to think we are the cause. When you've finished your shift, I'll speak to you in my office."

"Yes, sir."

Barker put his hand on Harry's shoulder. He didn't resist but stood up like a man sleepwalking. At the door he turned and looked at Murdoch. "I thank you for what you've already done for me, Will. I believe I'm ready to face my Maker. But I tell you, the punishment for my sins, my most grievous sins, is not for you to decide."

Barker led him out. Murdoch felt as if his legs might not hold him up any longer. He could hardly breathe, as if there were a scream trapped in his chest that was holding all the air in his body.

"Why don't you sit down for a moment, Mr. Murdoch." He became aware that Massie was standing close beside him.

“Why you, a police officer, were fighting with a prisoner under my care is something I will get you to explain at a later date. However, there is an urgent matter you must know about.”

Murdoch stared at him, unable to comprehend what he was saying.

“I did not want to say this in front of your father because it might cruelly raise his hopes. We have received a message over the telephone from Number Seven Station. Apparently, Walter Lacey’s wife has attempted to take her own life, and she has confessed to killing John Delaney.”

Chapter Fifty

MASSIE PUT HIS HAND ON MURDOCH'S SHOULDER. "The woman is still alive. Her husband found her just in time and carried her to the tavern. It was the publican who insisted you be sent for. I assume he is aware of your relationship with Harry."

"Yes, he is."

"Mr. Murdoch, I have been a warden for a long time, and I have perhaps seen all there is to see of human depravity and human foolishness. Unfortunately, I have encountered many instances of such confessions, which always prove to be spurious. It might be very tempting for you to clutch at this as a last hope of proving your father's innocence. But I do not advise it."

Murdoch pressed his fingertips against his temples. He had developed a stabbing headache.

"Mr. Murdoch? What would you like to do?"

He looked up. "I have to find out what this is all about. I'll go right away."

"Ah, I rather thought that would be your decision. I have made my carriage available to you. It is ready in the driveway."

"Warden Massie, if this is in fact a true confession, how shall I proceed?"

"Not to be facetious, but I'd advise, with the utmost speed. If you bring me credible proof that she was the one who killed Delaney, then I will be able to stay the execution. However" - he grimaced - "apparently her life hangs by a thread. It is highly likely she will have gone to Her Maker before you get to her."

Spontaneously, in spite of the warden's presence, Murdoch crossed himself.

"Dear Lord, preserve her soul."

"Amen to that," added Massie.

"And if she is already dead?"

"I cannot answer that question until I have heard all of the circumstances. God speed."

The warden's horse was young and well cared for so the coachman was able to hold a canter from the jail to the Manchester tavern, and they were there in less than thirty minutes. Murdoch replayed the confrontation with Harry over and over in his mind. The expression, *to be at the boiling point*, was virtually a literal truth about the way his body felt. The news about Jessica Lacey was a surprise. He'd gone through his list of local people in answer to "If not Harry, then who?" but he hadn't seriously considered her a suspect. "A spurious confession" was the term the warden had used. Momentarily, Murdoch wasn't sure if he wanted it to be genuine or not; but even in his anger, he couldn't stomach Harry hanging for a crime he didn't commit.

The coachman was pulling up his steaming horse in front of the tavern. They came to a halt, and he jumped down from his seat and opened the door of the carriage as smartly as if Murdoch were the warden himself.

"Shall I wait for you, sir?"

"Yes, for now."

As Murdoch got out, the front door opened and Newcombe waved at him.

"I heard the carriage," he said. "Come this way."

Murdoch followed him inside. "How is she?"

"Very weak. She lost a lot of blood."

"Will she recover?"

"The doctor is optimistic." He ushered Murdoch into the hall. "She's in the parlour. Walter carried her up from the ravine, and we put her in here."

"Can I talk to her?"

"The doctor said nobody should go in, but given the circumstances, he might relent."

"I have to, Vince. You know that."

Murdoch was on the verge of going into the parlour no matter what the opposition, but the doctor himself emerged.

"Dr. Moore, this is Detective Murdoch. I spoke to you about him."

The physician was a tall, thin man with what turned out to be an implacably cheerful bedside manner. He thrust out his hand and greeted Murdoch energetically.

"Yes, yes, no need to explain your astonishing circumstances; I heard the entire story, and I quite understand you will want to talk to the young woman. And so you shall, but not for too long. I have written down everything she said to me, as is the law, and she has even been able to sign the paper herself so you need not worry on that account."

Murdoch couldn't get a word in edgewise and had to wave his hand in a dumb show of wanting to go into the parlour.

"Give me ten more minutes, and then you can come in. She'll be quite all right," he continued, and he popped back into the room. Vince touched Murdoch's sleeve.

"Why don't you speak to Walter in the meantime? He's in the taproom with the constable."

"Vince, does Lacey know who I am?"

"Yes, I had to say it out. The sergeant wouldn't have sent for you otherwise." He hesitated. "Do you want to hear what happened first?"

"Yes, I would."

"Let's go into the kitchen then. We'll leave the door open, so we can see if the doctor comes out."

They went in.

"Tch, tch!" exclaimed Newcombe, and he quickly opened up the stove and pulled out a pan of meat. "Completely forgot about it in all the excitement."

He put the pan on the table and without being asked picked up the teapot and poured two mugs of tea. The tea had steeped so long, it almost walked into the mug, but Murdoch was glad to drink it.

“All right, tell me what happened.”

Newcombe sat down at the table. “Maria and me were having our dinner, right here, when we heard Walter calling from outside the window. I looked out and there he was with Jess in his arms. He’d carried her all the way up from the ravine. She’d cut both her wrists, and she looked nigh to death’s door. Well, we both ran out to help him, and he told us he’d found her in some hideaway near the cottage. Thank God he’d had the presence of mind to tear up his shirt and apply a tourniquet on both arms. And thank God for my Maria. She took right over. I brought Jess straight through into the parlour.” He pointed at the floor. “Look, you can see the blood spots. It was pumping out of her. Maria snatched up her towels and bound up the wrists tight. Walter looked like he was going to fall down himself, but Maria shook him into some sense and sent him back for the child, who was tagging behind him. We could hear her bawling from here. I ran off fast as I could to fetch Dr. Moore, who’s just around the corner, thank the Lord. I thought I’d see the lass dead when I got back, but she was still breathing and looking a bit better. Maria had got some brandy down her throat. Dr. Moore took over, but really Maria had done as much as could be done. He stitched up the wounds but it’s prayer now and waiting.”

“At what point did Jessica say she had killed Delaney?”

“About an hour ago. She recovered consciousness sufficiently to speak, and the doctor of course asked her why she had done such a dreadful thing to herself. She said it was because she had killed John Delaney, and an innocent man was going to be hung for it.” He patted Murdoch’s arm.

“Go on. I’m all right.”

“She said she wanted to talk to Maria alone, but my good wife was too sensible to be the sole witness. She got some paper and made the doctor write down what Jess said. Maria asked her why had she killed Delaney if 'twere true? ‘Because he tried to force himself upon me. I pushed him over the fence,’ Jess said.” Newcombe wiped his face with the back of his shirt sleeve. “All this time Walter was like a tethered wild horse. He just about burst. ‘You did not kill him. I told you that.’ Poor girl got mighty distressed at that and looked as if she was going to give up the ghost right there and then. The doctor said no more talking. He got Jess to sign the paper with what she had said; then he told me to take Walter into the other room. Which I did, although he didn’t come easy. I felt as if I was swimming in waters that was too deep for me, so I didn’t ask him any more. Dr. Moore came out and said he had to fetch his nurse, and he would go to the station and get a constable to come. I told him to have them find you and get you up here. I sat with Walter.” Newcombe screwed up his face. “I must tell you, Will, that was one of the longest hours I’ve ever spent. Neither of us spoke a word. I didn’t think it wise. I was only too happy to hand him over to Constable Stanworth. Ready?”

Murdoch nodded. They both drained the mugs of tea and went down the hall to the taproom.

Walter Lacey was seated in the ingle seat close to the fire, huddled in his chair. There was a blanket draped over his shoulders, and he was dressed only in his undershirt and trousers. He looked like a man who had been washed ashore after a shipwreck. Constable Stanworth was standing at the window. He saluted and he and Murdoch exchanged introductions.

Murdoch went over to Walter and sat down across from him in the ingle.

“Mr. Lacey. I know this is a most difficult time for you, but it is imperative I ask you some questions. I believe Mr.

Newcombe has told you who I am.”

“Let me make this clear. My Jess didn’t kill that devil, although she had damn good reason to. God himself wouldn’t pass judgement on her. She just thinks she did, and it’s weighed terrible on her conscience.”

“Please tell me what happened.”

Lacey blinked. “I suppose it was about nine o’clock. Everybody but Mr. Pugh had left. I was out back washing down the pit when Jess comes running in. She’s carrying our daughter and she’s white as paint. Sally’s screeching like she’s been stabbed. I couldn’t understand Jess at first; she’s trembling so much, she could hardly talk. Then I realise what she’s telling me ... that Delaney had come up to the cottage and tried to force himself on her. She says he’s had his eye on her for some time, which she’d never revealed to me before.” He clenched his fists and his eyes were so hot with rage, Murdoch could understand why his wife had kept her secret.

“Please continue, Mr. Lacey.”

“Delaney used the dog as a pretext. I knew he’d been bringing it around more frequently lately, but I thought it was so as Sally could play with it. But it was Jess he was after.” Again he stopped to regain some control. Newcombe and the constable hovered uneasily nearby. “She wouldn’t even tell me every which thing, but Sally witnessed it all. Delaney says he’s going to harm the child if Jess doesn’t give in. He makes like he’s going to tie Sally to the chair. But she manages to snatch her up and run outside. He follows after her, playing like a fox with a rabbit. Next thing she knew, he grabs her by the hair. But she’s got spirit, has my Jess, and she gives him a fight. She was too quick, and she got free. They had both got turned around somehow, so that he’s backed up against the rear fence. She gives him a shove as hard as she can, and he falls backward and rolls down the hill.” Lacey was starting to breathe hard as if he had been fighting himself. “According to Jess, he hit one of

the trees. She hardly took notice she was so needing to escape, but she says he lay still and she thought his neck was broken. She took Sally and fast as she could ran down the other path to the tavern. I told her we had to get Maria, but that really set her off again. She didn't want anybody to know, not even Maria. I said I'd look after everything. I ran back down to the ravine. There wasn't a sign of the bastard, living or dead. I came back and told her that. That he must have been able to get up and walk so his neck wasn't close to being broken, more's the pity. She starts to calm down but makes me promise I won't say anything or try to get revenge on Delaney. She says she would die from the shame of it. I tell you frankly, I'm beside myself but thought it best to wait and see what falls out. Maria is fetched and tends to both of them." He paused and looked over at Newcombe. "I'm as parched as a desert, Vince. Could you pour me a drop of spirit?"

The innkeeper hurried over to the counter and poured out a shot of whiskey. Murdoch waited as patiently as he could while Lacey drank some of the liquor, shuddering as men do who haven't had the fire in their belly for some time.

"She's just starting to get some colour back in her cheeks when along comes Philip Delaney a-looking for his pa, and well, you know the rest of it. He and Mr. Pugh found Delaney in the creek. He was dead, may he burn in hell. One bastard killed by another."

"Meaning Harry Murdoch?"

"That's right. I'd be lying if I said I was sorry. Justice was done. But Jess, she ... she let it plague her to the point where she's not stable. She lost the babe she was carrying right the next day. She's not been right since. Then she hears as the verdict is in, Harry Murdoch is convicted, and that was the last straw."

Murdoch crouched down so he could look into the other man's face. "Mr. Lacey, is your wife aware that the coroner himself said Delaney was killed near where he was found?"

He walked on his own legs down to the path. And even if that weren't the case, even if Delaney had broken his neck in a fall, no jury in the world would blame Jess for trying to defend herself."

"She wasn't up to attending the trial, but I told her and told her she wasn't responsible. She just moiled on it. Wouldn't believe me."

"Why didn't you, yourself, bring this forward at the trial?" asked Murdoch.

"Are you married?"

"No, I'm not."

"Then you can't understand."

"I know what it's like to love a woman. Married men don't have the prerogative on that."

"It's different when it's your wife. Getting her to talk about what happened was like taking a bandage off somebody who's been in a forest fire. I couldn't do that to her again and in public. It was obvious who the real killer was; there was no sense in destroying Jess and Sally any more than they'd already been destroyed."

Murdoch took a deep breath. "Mr. Lacey, I think you are a liar. That you are a yellow coward, and that for all your professions of love, you are, in fact, intent only on saving your own skin. That you would allow an innocent man to die for a crime he didn't commit and you would even allow your beloved wife to take her own life because she thinks she is the one responsible."

Lacey leaped to his feet, and it was only because Newcombe got in front of him in time that he wasn't at Murdoch's throat. The constable had to help force him back to the bench.

"Calm down, Walter," said Newcombe. "We're all under pressure here."

"He's not. It's not his wife who might die!"

"No, it's not!" Murdoch shouted back. "But Harry Murdoch is my father, and there is no doubt he will die - this Monday

morning at seven o'clock to be precise – unless I find out the truth."

"What truth? He did in Delaney."

"Did he? Or was it you?"

"Horsecrap!"

"Is it? I think you were the one who encountered Delaney when you ran back into the ravine. You were enraged at what he had done to your wife. You smashed him over the head then rolled his body into the creek, hoping it would look as if he had drowned by accident ..."

"No!"

"You told your wife you didn't see any sign of Delaney, but it's my guess she knows you're trying to protect her. She is an honourable woman, and she cannot bear the thought of an innocent man dying for something she did. But you don't care, do you? You'll let both of them die as long as *you* are alive. Isn't that the truth, Mr. Lacey?"

Tears were streaming down Lacey's face, and he could hardly speak for his sobs. Murdoch felt like a torturer.

"Look, Mister, if you think I would do that to Jess, you have another think coming. I would die on the rack before I saved myself and not her ..."

"Tell me the truth then. Did you or did you not kill John Delaney?"

"I swear I did not. I never saw him alive after he left this tavern."

"Will you take an oath on a Bible?"

"Yes."

Lacey caught Murdoch by the wrist. "And you? Do you swear to me that there is no possibility that Jess was responsible for the bastard's death?"

"I am sure of it."

"Then I will tell you the truth."

Murdoch looked over his shoulder at Newcombe. "Can you fetch us a Bible right away?"

Chapter Fifty-one

NEWCOMBE WENT TO THE BAR COUNTER , reached underneath, and removed a small Bible. Murdoch handed the book to Lacey.

“Hold this in your right hand.... Do you swear that the evidence you are about to give touching the death of John Delaney shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God.”

“I do.”

“Mr. Newcombe and Constable Stanworth, take note of what Mr. Lacey says, commit it to memory. I, myself, will write it down. Please go on, sir.”

Lacey slid the Bible onto the bench beside him. “What I have to say isn’t that much different from what I’ve already told you. If the man had been in front of me, I would cheerfully have killed him with my bare hands. But he wasn’t and I didn’t.”

“What did you do?”

“Like I said, as soon as I’d got the story out of Jess, I ran down into the ravine. I expected to find Delaney’s body, and I did. He was lying across the path just up along from the bridge. I could see he was dead. I thought she had killed him. How was I to know any different given what she’d told me? I didn’t have no clear plan, but I rolled him into the creek, like you said, thinking it would look like he’d slipped in accidentally.”

“Did you kick the body? Remember, you’re under oath.”

Lacey stared at the Bible beside him as if it would jump up and bite him. Reluctantly, he said, “Yes. I put the boots to him. I was only sorry he couldn’t feel it.”

“What then?”

"I ran straight back here. Jess was in such a desperate state I knew right there and then I wasn't going to tell her he was dead. So I said I hadn't seen hide nor hair of him. I didn't expect that Harry Murdoch would be found nearby, and that him and Delaney had had a fight." He wiped his wet face with the back of his wrist. "She couldn't have said anything that night; she was too upset. The next day she miscarried ... our first son. By the time she'd got over that sufficient to talk about what had happened, I'd heard enough to convince her that Harry Murdoch was the culprit, and it wouldn't matter if she gave evidence or not. She hadn't killed Delaney, Harry had. She was terrible low after she lost the child, but I thought she was coming out of it. But the trial last week was too much, as you see."

Murdoch turned a fresh page in his notebook. "How much time elapsed from when your wife came into the barn till you found Delaney?"

"I can't be too sure. Everything seemed to speed up. But I ran there and back, and that's about ten minutes or so each way."

"A few minutes to roll the body into the creek. Roughly twenty-five minutes. Add to that at least ten minutes or more for Mrs. Lacey to get here. She must have talked to you for another ten minutes at the minimum. All told that would give us about forty-five minutes from the time Delaney fell over the fence railing to when you found him. Did you touch him? Was the body still warm?"

"I don't know. I didn't think. He was dead, that's all I can say."

"Let's suppose he was hardly even stunned by that first fall. He gets to his feet and proceeds to walk down the steps. He must have seen Mrs. Lacey going by way of the other path. Who knows, perhaps he intended to catch her at the bridge? However, when he gets to the bottom of the hill, he meets up with somebody else. That person hits him from

behind, at least two blows and so hard the skull is fractured. That person disappears.”

Lacey scowled. “He didn’t go far. He was in the bushes. That person’s been convicted.”

“I don’t need to remind you, Mr. Lacey, that the verdict was reached without all the evidence being brought before the jury.”

“Don’t change the picture that much.”

“It might! Besides, that’s what our bloody justice system is all about, isn’t it? We let the jurymen hear everything, and they decide.”

Newcombe edged a little closer and Murdoch tried to calm down.

“Will the case be reopened?” asked Lacey.

“We’ll see when I take all this new information to the warden.”

“If there is a new trial, Jess will have to go on the witness stand, won’t she?”

“Yes, I’m afraid so.”

Lacey’s face was contorted with grief. “She would have spoke up if I’d insisted. But I couldn’t bear to put her through the ordeal ...”

He was interrupted by Maria Newcombe entering the room. “Excuse me, gentlemen, but Jess is asking to speak to Walter.”

He jumped up. “How is she?”

Maria smiled a little. “I do believe she will recover. Now only a minute with her. I think she is worried about Sally.”

Lacey followed Maria from the room, the blanket clutched about his shoulders.

Murdoch let out a long, deep breath. “What do you think, Vince? Is this man telling the truth?”

“I do believe he is, Will.”

“Constable Stanworth?”

The young man blushed a little with pleasure that Murdoch was consulting him.

"I found him convincing, sir."

Suddenly, there was a soft whimper from behind the screen. Tripper appeared, a puppy dangling by its scruff from her mouth. Newcombe went over to her. "You get back in there." His voice was fond. He picked up both dogs and replaced them in the whelping box. "Ever since we took the puppy up to the Delaney house, she keeps wanting to move the remaining litter to another place. I don't want her to lose him. I might have to chain her up."

Murdoch had been in the process of looking over the notes he had just taken, and he only half heard. However, at that moment, there was a shift in his mind rather as if a stereoscope card had come into focus. He went over to Newcombe and grabbed him by both arms.

"Vince, what did you just say?"

"About Tripper? Just that she's trying to move the pups ..."

"And you might have to chain her up?"

"Yes ..."

Murdoch let him go. "Goddamn it, my own anger has closed my mind like one of your traps. From the beginning I assumed Harry was lying or simply did not remember. That he was guilty as charged. But what if it happened just as he said it did? He goes to the bridge, falls and hits his cheek. A bit of bad coincidence for him that Delaney clouted somebody as well. Let's say for now, a different person. Then Harry staggers further along the path, passes out. He admitted to me that he had a hazy memory of Delaney standing over him. We assumed they'd had a barney. Harry is accustomed to barneys that he doesn't recollect. But what if that wasn't the case? That Delaney came across him, either on his way to the Lacey cottage or afterward. Nothing else happened. The only credence I have been able to give to my father is that he might have been too drunk to be capable of a fight. So let's say Delaney left him where he was. Then he returned to the path, and here he encountered his murderer. Probably this is where Delaney got his scraped

knuckles. However, that person picked up a heavy piece of wood and, when Delaney turned his back, hit him hard. The coroner said the blows came at a downward angle and concluded they were delivered by a tall man, hence Harry, but that doesn't have to be the case. If I shoved you to your knees, then hit you, the blows would come from above your head. Am I right?"

Newcombe was regarding him doubtfully. "Yes, I suppose so."

"And, Vince, all this while, Havoc was still in his box."

"Is that important?"

"I'm beginning to think it is crucial. You see, I've also assumed the girl is too confused to say the truth or to know what happens. But what if that's not the case? What if she was telling me exactly what took place."

"Do you mean Nan?"

"I do. I can't explain at the moment, Vince, it would take too long. Come on, I've got to talk to Mrs. Lacey."

Murdoch beckoned to the constable. "There is a carriage waiting outside. I want you to go to Warden Massie at the Don Jail. Tell him you have a message from me that there is new evidence, no, say absolute evidence, that there must be a new trial. I will meet him as soon as I can. Make sure you see him eye to eye. Even if he's in his own quarters, you must find him. Can you do that?"

"Yes, sir."

Murdoch led the way on the double out of the taproom.

Chapter Fifty-two

MURDOCH COULDN'T RECALL SEEING ANYONE as pale who was still among the quick. Jessica Lacey was lying on the couch, her wrists heavily bandaged. Her dark hair had come unpinned and was loose on the pillow, accentuating the whiteness of her face. However, her eyes were open, and she looked directly at him when he came over to her. Dr. Moore had sent Walter to his daughter, and Maria Newcombe was now sitting on a stool beside Jessica.

"Two minutes and no more, Mr. Murdoch," said the doctor.

Maria indicated the empty chair next to her, and Murdoch sat down.

"Mrs. Lacey, I am a police officer.... Your husband has told me what happened the night of Delaney's death." He paused because she had flinched as if he had touched her with something white hot. "I must emphasise that you are entirely free from culpability in the murder. Entirely so. Mrs. Lacey, it now seems possible that Harry Murdoch is not guilty of this crime. I am trying to uncover evidence that was not disclosed at the trial." Again he saw the flinching, not as pronounced but there. "Please do not think for a moment that your husband was responsible. I am certain he was not. However, he *did* lie to you. He did come across Delaney's body on the path, and it was Walter who rolled the body into the creek. He was afraid to tell you, and when you became ill, decided not to rescind his story, convinced Harry Murdoch was the killer."

Jessica closed her eyes, and Maria sat forward in alarm. However, Jess seemed only to be gathering her strength because she spoke, her voice light and brittle as a dried leaf.

“What do you want?”

“I am so sorry I have to speak of the dreadful events of that night, but I must. You don’t have to talk if that is too much for you. A nod will suffice.”

“When Delaney came to your cottage that night, did he bring his dog with him?”

She nodded and whispered, “He had come before. Flash was his introduction. Sally liked him.”

“What did he do with the dog? Was it in the house?”

Murdoch could see Maria frowning at him, not comprehending the relevance of the questions. Jessica licked her lips.

“No. It was raining and I had washed the floor. I asked him to leave the dog outside. He tied him to the fence.”

“And when you took Sally and ran down the other path, was the dog still tied up?”

“I’m not sure ... yes, yes, he was. He was barking.”

Gently, Murdoch placed his hand over hers. “Thank you, Mrs. Lacey. There is only one more thing I have to ask you. Has Philip Delaney been paying his attentions to you?”

This time she didn’t answer, and her nod was almost imperceptible.

Murdoch stood up. “That is all I wanted to know. Please set your mind at rest now.”

Dr. Moore approached the couch. “I’m going to give her a sedative powder. Mrs. Newcombe, help me raise her, will you?”

Murdoch left them to their ministrations and went out into the hall. Vince was waiting for him. “What can I do to help?”

Murdoch had contemplated asking Newcombe to come with him but decided against it. His case felt as delicately balanced as a house of cards, and he couldn’t risk anything that might bring it tumbling down.

“Nothing at the moment. I’m going to talk to Mrs. Bowling again.” He smiled. “If I don’t come back before nightfall, come and find me.”

Once outside, he set off as fast as he could into the ravine. He didn't know if anybody else knew about Jessica's suicide attempt, and he couldn't risk losing even a few minutes.

The cows watched him with indifference as he hurried by. The short winter afternoon was drawing in, and the candle shining in the front window of the cottage winked brightly in the gloom. Nan was sitting there, her face pressed against the glass. She saw him approaching and waved a greeting, a child's happy greeting at seeing anybody who might relieve the tedium of the day.

He smiled and indicated she should open the door. She looked worried and shook her head. He tried again but it was obvious she wasn't going to let him in. He went up the steps and banged hard on the door.

"Open up, Mrs. Bowling, I'm a police officer. Open up!"

He heard the bolt slide, and the door opened a crack. It wasn't Mrs. Bowling but Nan, who peeked out.

"Nan, I must speak to your mother."

"She's resting."

"Will you wake her up then? Tell her it's urgent."

He almost considered pushing his way into the house, but he didn't want to frighten the girl. Fortunately, Mrs. Bowling woke up.

"Who's making all that din?" came her querulous voice.

This time Murdoch did push.

"Excuse me, Nan, I must come in." She stepped back. The cottage was cold and dark, the only candle the one in the window. Mrs. Bowling was sprawled in the armchair. She half sat up when she saw him and pulled a grimy quilt up around her chest.

"What do you want?"

"Mrs. Bowling, I'm a police officer."

"What? I thought you said you were a reporter."

"I did say that, but in fact I'm a detective, and I am investigating the Delaney murder."

"What? It's over with."

"It's not. There is new evidence in the case."

"What?"

"I have just come from the Manchester tavern. Earlier today, Jessica Lacey tried to take her own life."

He paused to see her reaction.

"Poor desperate woman. I'm not a bit surprised. Miscarries take some women that way."

"The reason she gave is that she says she is the one responsible for Delaney's death."

Nan had understood what he said, and she touched his sleeve.

"Has Mrs. Lacey gone to heaven?"

"No, she hasn't, Nan. She is going to be all right."

"Philip will be glad."

"He likes Mrs. Lacey, does he?"

She grinned. "She is his sweetheart. He gives her squirrels."

"Don't listen to her," her mother cried out. "She doesn't have a proper mind."

Murdoch went over to the armchair and crouched in front of Mrs. Bowling so that he was a few inches from her face. Her breath was ripe with the smell of wine.

"I'll listen to you then. On the night Delaney died, you were here in the cottage. Nan said Philip came to the house with two dogs. One was Flash, the other was a little grey dog the colour of ashes. It belonged to Harry Murdoch. Nan couldn't have made that up."

"Yes, she could, but why does it matter?"

"One of them was in a box, the other was tied to a fence. Why did Philip have these dogs?"

"I didn't see him with any dogs."

"Yes, Momma, two dogs. Philip was crying, but I cheered him."

"Be quiet, you minx," said her mother. "You've got it wrong. It wasn't that night at all. Mister, she can't even tell

you what day it is let alone what happened last August. Look. Nan, tell him what today is. Go on, tell him."

"It's Tuesday," said Nan with a grin.

"See."

"Yes, you've gone to great lengths to prove to me that Nan gets confused."

Mrs. Bowling shrugged. "She does. You can't count on anything."

He wanted to grab her by the neck and shake her.

"I notice that you have some fine gifts from Mrs. Delaney."

"What of it?"

"Did she give you them to buy silence? So you wouldn't talk?"

"About what? I have nothing to say."

He leaned closer. "So you don't care that a man is about to be hung for a crime he didn't commit? You know he is innocent. You've known all along he is innocent."

"If you mean, did I know about Jessica Lacey, no I did not. Besides, any confession from her isn't likely to be true. She's not of sound mind. She's been unhinged ever since she lost the babe she was carrying."

"Do you know what was the most likely cause of that miscarriage, Mrs. Bowling?"

"Of course I don't."

"John Delaney, respected citizen and family man, tried to rape her. He had been after her for some time. It was not the first time he'd shown such tendencies. He was a man of lust, Mrs. Bowling." She tried to back away from him but there was nowhere to go.

"He never showed that to me."

"Oh, don't give me that rubbish. Vince Newcombe found Delaney with Nan. Delaney would have had her if Vince hadn't shown up. The helpless ones are destroyed. You told me that yourself."

"I was talking about chickens."

Murdoch looked over at Nan, who had sat in her chair and was rocking back and forth. She had draped her leg over the arm of the chair so that her drawers were visible. She caught his glance and smiled, and he saw again the disconcerting precocious sexuality.

Mrs. Bowling saw what her daughter was doing. "Nan, sit properly and pull your skirt down."

Murdoch moved back. "I don't have the good fortune to have a daughter, Mrs. Bowling, but if I had and she were like Nan, I would want to protect her with every last drop of my blood and I would want to kill any man who used her that way."

The room was too dark for him to see her expression clearly, but he sensed that what he said had made an impact.

"From the sound of it, you think I killed John Delaney. As if I could!"

"I saw you hauling a heavy pot around. You're no weakling."

She looked over at Nan. "Light some candles, there's a good girl."

The girl got off the chair eagerly. Mrs. Bowling watched her for a moment as she clumsily struck a match. "My daughter is simple-minded as you see, and there's always some wicked enough to take advantage. She's just a baby, but she's learned what will get her sweets."

"I'm sorry."

"She is my cross to bear."

Nan lit one of the candles then a second. She carried one over to the side table near Murdoch. For a moment she studied him in the way that very young children do.

"Is your poppa dead, too?"

"No, no, he's not, Nan."

"Philip is my dear friend," she said.

Her mother sighed. "Yes, he is. Thanks be to Jesus that she does have one friend in the world."

Murdoch felt the mood in the room shift again. The momentary softness was gone. Mrs. Bowling was as wary as a stalking cat.

"Philip has his troubles, too," she continued. "Perhaps that is why they have become like brother and sister. My Nan relies on him, and when I am gone, God forbid, he will take care of her."

"I see."

"Philip's poppa hit him on the head," said Nan. "So he wrung his neck till he was dead."

"That's enough. Nobody wants to hear from you."

Murdoch went a little closer to the girl but carefully, not wanting to frighten her.

"Nan, when Philip came here with the two dogs, did he tell you he had wrung his father's neck?"

She nodded her head with delight. "He had a fit, and his poppa went straight up to heaven in a carriage."

Mrs. Bowling jumped out of her chair and rushed at her daughter, her arm raised to strike. "Hold your tongue, you silly girl."

Murdoch caught her in time. "Leave her alone. I have the authority to arrest you for interfering with a police investigation and believe me I will have no hesitation in doing so."

"You can't believe anything the child says."

"Can't I? Let's see."

Nan was looking increasingly anxious as the tension built in her mother, and he spoke to her gently.

"What did you mean, Nan, when you said Philip had a fit? What did he do?"

"He wrung his poppa's neck."

"Why did he do that?"

"His poppa was hurting Philip's sweetheart. He was in the hideaway. We built it together, and when Momma let me play in the woods I used to stay in there for weeks and years."

"I've seen it, Nan, and it is quite splendid. But how do you know Philip killed his poppa, Nan? Did he tell you?"

"Yes. He came to the door ..." "Nan, for goodness ..."

"Mrs. Bowling, I warned you. I shall continue this at the police station if you don't let her continue."

But Nan was rapidly losing her interest in the conversation, and he could see she was afraid of her mother.

"What else?" he prompted her.

She got up and went over to the dresser that was underneath the window, pulled open a drawer, and removed something. She held out her hand, palm up. In it was resting a small triangular-shaped piece of bone.

"Philip gave it to me," she said, and she popped it into her mouth. With her lips lightly closed she blew out and emitted a thin, high whistling sound. Pleased with his response, she blew again.

"Can I see that?" he asked.

She removed the whistle from her mouth and handed it to him.

"The dogs hear it better than us. Flash was killing hundreds of rats, but Philip's poppa stopped him." She looked at Murdoch. "Are you going to take Philip to a dungeon because he did a bad thing?"

Her eyes had filled with tears, and her lower lip was trembling. She seemed so lost, he wanted to take her in his arms and comfort her, but he knew he couldn't.

"I have to go and talk to him, Nan. If Philip has done something wrong, you wouldn't want somebody else to be punished by mistake, would you?"

This was too complicated for her, however, and she began to weep in earnest.

The noise of her crying masked the creak of the door, and Murdoch wasn't aware that anybody was behind him until he felt a violent shove that knocked him to the ground. Instinctively, he rolled over to his side.

The brass head of the walking stick that Philip Delaney was holding came down inches from his arm.

Chapter Fifty-three

“LEAVE HER ALONE !” Philip screamed and swung the walking stick again, Murdoch barely had time to deflect the blow so that it landed on his upper arm. He was at a severe disadvantage, half on his hands and knees, and all he could do was scrabble backwards and try to shield himself. Philip’s face was that of a madman. Murdoch was aware of Mrs. Bowling standing behind them not uttering a word. It was Nan who saved him. She started to cry.

“Philip, he’s nice. Don’t hit him anymore. He’s my friend.”

Philip actually stopped in midswing.

Mrs. Bowling said, “He was trying to hurt Nan.”

Philip dropped the stick, giving Murdoch time to stand up. He was still off balance, however, and before he could defend himself, Philip grabbed him by the throat. Murdoch was pushed back with the force, and he gripped his attacker’s wrists to pull them off him. But Delaney had the furious strength of a lunatic, and Murdoch could feel the air being squeezed out of him. Nan was squealing while the two men shuffled in a grotesque dance. Murdoch let go and at the same time dropped his weight suddenly downwards. Taken by surprise at the lack of resistance, Philip relaxed his grip for a moment. Murdoch brought his arms up and outward breaking the hold on his throat. At the same time, he lunged forward with his head in a savage butt to the chin. Blood spurted from Philip’s mouth. He howled and dropped to his knees. Murdoch was on top of him in a moment, grabbing his arm and twisting it behind his back. Philip fell forward, his face pressed into the floor. He began to cry like a child.

"I'm sorry, Poppa. Don't hurt me anymore."

"Put your other arm behind your back."

Philip did so and Murdoch was able to hold both wrists.

"Mrs. Bowling, hand me that scarf." His voice was harsh and raspy.

"He won't cause any more trouble. You can let him go."

"Hand me the scarf. If you disobey or create any more disturbance, I promise you I will see that you end up in jail."

Sullenly, she picked up Philip's muffler, which had fallen to the floor, and handed it to Murdoch. He tied it tightly around Philip's wrists then cautiously he got off his back. Nan crept over and dropped to her knees, patting Philip's head to comfort him.

He reached down and pulled at Delaney's bound arms. "Stand up. You are under arrest for assaulting a police officer. If you try to resist in any way, it will go badly for you. Do you understand me?"

Philip's chin was covered in blood from his bitten lip, and his nose was running. Awkwardly, he got to his feet, Nan dancing around him nervously. The heat from the life-or-death struggle that had flooded Murdoch's body began to subside. He reached in his pocket, took out his handkerchief, and wiped away the blood and mucous from Philip's face. The fellow had minutes ago been intent on murdering him, but as he looked at him standing with his head bowed, his coat bloodstained, and tears rolling down his face, Murdoch felt his own anger dissipating.

"Your poppa hurt you, did he?"

"You don't have to tell him anything," called out Mrs. Bowling, but he didn't seem to hear her.

"He was hurting Mrs. Lacey. She's my sweetheart."

"Did you see him?"

He nodded. "I was in my hideaway. I heard her crying."

"What did you do then?"

"Don't answer that. He has no right to ask questions."

Murdoch turned to face her. "Mrs. Bowling, I have already warned you about interfering."

"What about him? What will my Nan do if anything happens to Philip?"

"All I want is the truth. The law protects innocents."

More blood was seeping from Philip's lip, and he licked it away.

Murdoch dabbed at it. "Philip, if I untie you, will you promise me to sit in that chair and not move until I give you permission?"

"Yes."

"Mrs. Bowling, sit over there beside Nan where I can see you. If you try to incite him in any way, it will be the worse for him."

He waited while she did as he said; then he untied the muffler from Philip's wrists and gave him the handkerchief. Nan was back swinging her legs, singing quietly to herself.

"Now, Philip, it would help me if you'd answer my question. After you heard your father hurting Mrs. Lacey, what did you do?"

"I stayed in the hideaway." He sniffed. "I was afraid. Then it was quiet except for Sally, who was crying. And Flash was barking, too."

"Did you go and get Flash?"

He looked confused. "I thought I'd better wait, but then Poppa came down the steps. He was really angry at me when he saw I was in the hideaway." He rubbed the side of his head. "He gave me such a stotter, see right here."

"That must have hurt a lot." "Yes, it did."

"What happened after that? Did you lose your temper just like you did now?"

Philip grinned at him shamefacedly. "I don't remember."

"Try. He hit you hard. What did you do?"

"I went and got Flash."

"Before that. Did you pick up a stick and hit your poppa?"

Philip thought for a moment. "I forget."

Epilogue

FOR THE NEXT TWO WEEKS , Murdoch looked and sounded like a pugilist. The capillaries under his eyes had burst from the constriction on his throat and were now black shadows. His vocal cords were bruised. Mrs. Kitchen immediately bought the Christmas goose, cooked it, and used the grease to rub on his neck. She also stood over him while he swallowed big spoonfuls of the oily mess. He was obliged to take more sick leave from duty, which he couldn't afford but which he was enjoying.

Massie had immediately cancelled the hanging, and after hearing Murdoch's report he had agreed there were grounds for a retrial, which was to take place early in the new year. Murdoch consulted Sam Quinn, who recommended a barrister he referred to as a sly fox who could be hired for a reasonable sum.

However, Murdoch couldn't face a meeting with his father. For one thing, it was painful to talk, for another Murdoch wasn't yet reconciled to him. Instead, he wrote a letter outlining what he thought had happened the night of the betting match. After Jessica Lacey had fled, Delaney had got to his feet and walked down the steps to the path. Partway down, he was confronted by his son, who was distraught about what he had overheard. He must have challenged his father, and Delaney struck him. At this point Philip lost his temper, probably shoved his father to the ground and hit him on the back of the head, killing him. The lad had then gone up and released Flash. Either he saw Harry and let Havoc out of his box, or the terrier had already got free. Regardless, Philip had taken both dogs and gone to see Nan.

All this time Harry was lying unconscious in the long grass, just as he said. Lacey's actions had overlaid what happened but there was little doubt Harry would still have been accused. Whether or not a jury would believe this was what actually happened remained to be seen. Neither Philip nor Nan would be credible witnesses, and Mrs. Bowling was going to do everything she could to deny Philip's presence at her house. However, Mr. Quinn's "sly fox" thought he had a good case.

Tonight, Murdoch was trying to switch his thoughts onto a different track. Mrs. Kitchen had invited Enid and Alwyn to dinner. They had all feasted on the goose and stuffed themselves on the dark, rich plum pudding that Mrs. Kitchen had been preparing for weeks. Now the table and chairs had been pushed against the wall to make a bit of room, and they were all gathered close to the Christmas tree. Mrs. Kitchen had fixed tiny candles on the branches, which were also hung with gingerbread men and sugar candy sticks. At the base of the tree was a satisfying pile of boxes and parcels that Alwyn was assessing with great concentration. Havoc, greatly improved in health and temperament, was at his feet. The terrier had come to stay, and he and the boy were immediate friends.

"Mr. Murdoch, I believe you are going to act as Father Christmas's representative," said Mrs. Kitchen. Arthur was at the far side of the circle, and Murdoch felt a pang when he saw how his friend was struggling not to cough.

"I am indeed," he said, and jumped up. He picked up a beribboned parcel. "This is addressed to Master Alwyn Jones."

"That's me," said Alwyn. Excited, Havoc yipped.

Alwyn tore open his package and lifted out a brand-new board game called A TRIP TO MARS . Murdoch was highly gratified to see the boy's pleasure. He had stewed over what to buy him for days.

Enid spoke to her son in Welsh.

"Thank you, Mr. Murdoch," he said, and walked over and gave him a kiss on the cheek.

Murdoch tapped him lightly on the side of the head. "We'll have a game soon."

The boy sat down again, ready for the next present.

"For Mrs. Kitchen," Murdoch said. The box was a large one, and Beatrice looked appropriately mystified. "This is from Father Christmas himself," said Murdoch. In fact, he and Arthur had joined in to buy her a special present. With maddening slowness she unwrapped her box.

"Oh my," she whispered. Nestled in soft red tissue paper was a caperine of grey seal. She lifted it out, stroking the sleek fur. "Oh my," she said again, as she saw the matching winter hat. Murdoch grinned at Arthur. The short cape was Enid's idea, and the two men had willingly agreed to it.

Murdoch returned to his tasks. Mrs. Kitchen surprised him by her gift of a book by Mr. Oliver Wendell Holmes who, as far as he knew, was not a Roman Catholic. He'd guessed that Enid would give him hand-monogrammed handkerchiefs, which she had. That deserved a kiss, albeit chaste, out of deference to his landlady. Enid seemed delighted with the cut-glass bottle of perfume he gave her, and that garnered another kiss. She had bought the Kitchens a stereoscope and a dozen cards, all pictures of Egypt. This was an excellent choice as Arthur found reading taxing these days but still had a lively curiosity about the world.

When all the parcels were opened, there was a sudden rather awkward silence. In previous years, after the ritual of gift giving, Beatrice had suggested the three of them say a rosary together, and Murdoch was afraid she might do so again. However, with great tact, she didn't, only murmuring what a splendid Christmas they were having. It was Havoc who distracted everyone by seizing a piece of paper and proceeding to tear it to pieces. Murdoch snatched him up.

“Enough of that, you imp.” The dog touched Murdoch’s chin with his cold nose. “Give me a kiss then,” said Murdoch.

Havoc nipped him instead.

Everybody burst out laughing, as Murdoch dropped the terrier to the floor.

“Come here, you naughty dog,” said Mrs. Kitchen.

“Don’t be nice to him, Mrs. K., he’s wicked,” said Murdoch, dabbing at his bleeding chin.

But Havoc, like all dogs, had an unerring instinct for a soft touch, and he trotted over to Beatrice and licked her outstretched hand.

“See, he didn’t mean to hurt you,” she said.

“Oh, but he did,” interjected Alwyn. “He doesn’t like him.” Murdoch sighed.

Author's Note

I strive to be as accurate as possible with my historical details concerning Victorian Toronto. However, in one instance I have changed the facts to suit the fiction. J. M. Massie was the warden of the Central Prison, not the Don Jail, as I have it in the book. I made this change for two reasons: The Don Jail still exists and you can go and have a look at it if you want to (the outside only). The Central Prison, which was on Strachan Street, was torn down. Secondly, Mr. Massie left behind correspondence and a fascinating journal, which I was able to read. Some of the things I have him say in the book are his own words, and the views he expresses are certainly his.

Acknowledgements

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As always, my editor, Ruth Cavin, is astute, kind, and improves everything.

NIGHT'S CHILD

Maureen Jennings



McCLELLAND & STEWART

Night's Child

MAUREEN JENNINGS



McGraw-Hill & Stewart

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Author's Note and Acknowledgements

*For Iden as always, and this one for
Peter Outerbridge, the best Murdoch imaginable*

“...he is but Night’s child.”
(said of Tarquin, who has ravished Lucrece)

-William Shakespeare, *The Rape of Lucrece*

PROLOGUE

She hadn't liked Leonard Sims one bit. He was sly and spiteful, never missing an opportunity to make a jibe at her expense. In spite of her resolve not to, she'd often been reduced to tears and he'd laughed at her in triumph.

See. You've got the backbone of a slug. You feel like one too.

No one cared enough to protect her from his unrelenting cruelty, but perhaps they didn't even notice. That was the more likely explanation, and she was used to not being noticed. So when she understood that Leonard Sims was dead, she was glad at first. Serves him right, she thought. He'd pushed just once too often. But then she had to go with them when they carried the body in a chest down to the frozen lake. They needed a cab to get there and at first none came by because it was late and the snow was thick and blowing in everybody's face. The cabbie hadn't wanted to take them, said his horse was tired and he was on his way to the stables.

This poor girl has got to visit her old aunt who lives near the shore. You can see how perishing she is. Open your heart.

The cabbie agreed when they paid him double the usual fare.

They didn't bother to tell her what they were doing and, of course, she didn't ask. After the cabbie left, she had to stand there, in her too-thin coat, shivering with cold, to keep lookout. She was so afraid, she was actually whimpering, but the swirling snow blotted up the sounds as the two men vanished into the darkness.

They hauled the chest across the lake to where a short promontory thrust out from the shore. Here they must have shoved it under the overhang. It took them almost ten

minutes to trudge there and back through the knee-high snow and they both cursed the weather.

Never mind. When the ice melts, the bloody thing will sink to the bottom and never be found. Goodbye, Sims , and they had both laughed at the joke.

CHAPTER ONE

Miss Amy Slade was seated at her desk, surveying her class. For the moment, the room was quiet, the only sound was of chalk moving on slate boards. By rights the children should have been writing in notebooks, but Miss Slade had taken spare slates from the lower standards and used them for rough work. "Then you don't have to worry about perfection, which as we know doesn't exist," she told her pupils. She caught the eye of Emmanuel Hart and frowned at him.

"How many times must I remind you, Emmanuel? The mind is like a muscle and must be exercised else it grow flabby and inert."

The boy bent his head immediately to the task of long division. He was a big boy, too old to still be in the fourth standard, but he had missed a lot of school and his reading and writing was barely at the level of the younger children. In a different classroom he would have been either the bully or the butt of ridicule. Not here. Miss Slade, without ever resorting to the cane, ran a tight, disciplined ship. She was strict about what she called the rules of order, which she'd established on the first day of the term. No talking when there was work to be done; only one voice at a time when

there was a question-and-answer period; absolutely no tormenting of other children. Any infraction of these rules and the offending child, almost always one of the boys, was sent to the Desk of Thoughtfulness, which was right under her nose. Here he had to sit and reflect on his behaviour while all around him the class enjoyed the games and competitions that Miss Slade used to liven up her lessons. "Learning should be the most fun you ever have," she told her pupils. And so she made it. On her desk was a large jar full of brightly coloured boiled sweets. The winner of the competition could choose one. But it was not just the succulent bribery of raspberry drops that won the children's devotion, even though that helped a great deal. What they came to respect most was Miss Slade's justice. She dispensed praise and occasional scoldings with an absolutely even hand whether it was to a hopeless case like Emmanuel Hart or to Mary, the clever, exquisitely dressed daughter of Councillor Blong. One or two of the girls, already too prissy to be saved, disliked and mistrusted her, but the others loved her.

This was Miss Slade's third year of teaching at Sackville Street School and her fourth placement. Although her pupils didn't know it, her contract was precarious. She was far too radical a teacher for the board's taste, and if she hadn't consistently produced such excellent results, she would have been dismissed long ago.

She waited a moment longer, enjoying the *put, put* sound of the chalk on the slates. Then she clapped her hands.

"Excellent. There is nothing quite as fine as the silence of the intelligent mind at work. What is it that makes so much noise? Hands up if you know the answer."

Every arm shot up, hands waving like fronds.

"Good. I would expect you to know the answer to that as I have said it innumerable times. Who hasn't answered a question lately? Benjamin Fisher, you."

The skinny boy's face lit up. "The most noise in the brain comes from the rattle of empty thoughts, Miss Slade."

"Yes, of course. You can get a sweet later. Now, wipe off your slates, everybody, and put them in your desks."

There was a little flurry of activity, desk lids lifted, as the children did as she asked.

"Monitors, open the windows wide, if you please."

Florence Birrell and Emmanuel Hart got up promptly and went to push up the window sashes. Cold air poured into the classroom, which was hot and stuffy. The large oil heater in the centre of the room dried out the air. The girls who were sitting closest to the windows wrapped their arms in their pinafores for warmth while the boys remained stoic.

"Good! Stand beside your desks, everybody, and assume your positions for cultivation of the chest."

The children stood in the aisles, their heels pressed together, toes turned out at an angle.

"Remember now, your weight must be forward on the balls of your feet. Let me see. Rise up."

One or two of the boys deliberately lost their balance, which gave them an excuse to flail their arms and grab on to the desk beside them.

"George Strongithorn, stop that. You will sit out the exercise in the Desk of Thoughtfulness if you misbehave again. You are quite capable of standing on your toes. All right, children, you may assume your correct position once more."

Miss Slade began to walk up and down, inspecting her pupils. She had her cane pointer in her hand but not to whack at any child, merely to correct.

Benjamin's older sister, Agnes Fisher, who was directly in front of the open window, shivered violently. She was wearing only a thin cotton jersey underneath her pinafore.

"Agnes, come to the front. It's warmer out of the air."

Miss Slade faced the class. "Now, all together. Inhale... and exhale as you say the word *far*. Whispers please. *Farr*

.”

There was a soft sighing throughout the room.

“Twice more. Joseph, for goodness sake, your mouth should be closed, not catching flies.”

A giggle ran through the ranks.

Miss Slade, whose chest was well cultivated, lead the way. “Inhale through the right nostril only. And exhale through the left nostril.”

Henry Woolway had a bad cold and blew out some snot as he exhaled. He wiped it away with his sleeve. Without comment Miss Slade handed him a clean handkerchief from her pocket.

The children continued to breathe, first through one nostril then the other, puny chests thrust out and upward.

“All right, we will pause for a moment. Isaiah, you are still prone to making your shoulders do all the work. That is wrong. It is the lower chest that must rise.”

“Sorry, Miss Slade. My chest bone hurts if I breathe in too deep.”

Isaiah had a persistent dry cough.

She tapped hard on her own chest with her two fingers. “This is what you must do every day without fail, Isaiah. Firm percussion for five minutes. Then splash cold water on your neck and chest, followed by a dry warm towel. Within three weeks, we should see some improvement.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

There were four younger children in Isaiah’s family and the closest he got to water in the morning was a damp rag that his mother made him whisk around the face and ears of the two next down. She didn’t seem to notice whether he did the same to himself. Miss Slade read his face correctly.

“On second thoughts, Isaiah, we’ll do the exercise when you come to school and I will be able to supervise.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Now, everyone, let us move into rapid breathing.” She consulted the gold fob watch on her bodice. “I think we are

ready to try for three minutes. When I say *go*, breathe in through the right nostril as rapidly as possible, then out through the left. Are you ready? Shoulders down, mouth quite closed. Begin. Quietly please.”

With finger and thumb to their noses, as they had been instructed, the children began, Miss Slade keeping time like a band conductor. “And in...and out...Inhale and exhale.”

The class was breathing in unison, sounding like an animal in its death throes. The two-minute mark was just reached when suddenly Agnes Fisher, with a barely audible gasp, fell backwards, gracefully and quietly as if her body had turned to cloth. She lay still, her eyelids fluttering.

“Goodness me, Agnes.” Miss Slade ran over to her, knelt down, and took one of the girl’s hands in hers. She began to rub it. “Agnes! Agnes! Can you hear me?”

The girl’s face had turned as white as the chalk. The other children gathered around them, their faces sombre and afraid. Benjamin looked down at his sister in terror.

“It’s all right, Ben. She’s just fainted. See, she’s coming around. She had a bit too much oxygen, I’m afraid.” Miss Slade slipped her hands underneath the girl’s arms and helped her to sit up. “Children, please return to your seats.” She waited for a moment to make sure her order was obeyed. “Agnes, are you hurt anywhere?”

The girl put her hand to her head. “I feel a bit dizzy, Miss Slade.”

“Stay where you are then. It will pass. Ben, get a sweetie from the jar, quick as you can. A barley sugar.”

The boy hurried to do what she said. Miss Slade offered it to the girl.

“Pop this in your mouth and suck on it slowly.”

She noticed that there were small dark bruises on the child’s wrist and a larger one, already yellowing, above her eyebrow, which her hair had hidden. It was not the first time she had seen such marks.

“Can you sit at your desk now, do you think?”

“Yes, ma’am,” whispered Agnes.

With her teacher’s help she got up slowly, then returned to her place.

“Did you have any breakfast, Agnes?”

“No, ma’am. We were late getting up.”

Miss Slade knew better than to ask why. Mrs. Fisher had died more than a year ago and the children were left to fend for themselves most days. Mr. Fisher, as Miss Slade had discovered, was a man of intemperate habits.

She regarded the worried faces in front of her.

“Children, I think it’s time for recess. Yes, I know it’s a little earlier than usual, Maud, but I think we all need some time in the open air. Florence and Mary, will you accompany Agnes? Walk a few times around the playground. Don’t forget, heads up, breathe through your nose.”

She placed her hand over the girl’s. “Are you feeling better now?”

“Yes, ma’am, thank you.” The girl’s habitual dull look had returned. She was one of Miss Slade’s least responsive pupils.

“Off you go, then.”

The children made a dash for the hooks on the wall where they’d hung their coats and hats. Florence and Mary had a little scuffle as to who would link arms with Agnes. Mary won, and with a precocious maternal expression, she lead Agnes out of the room. Benjamin trailed behind.

Miss Slade sighed. Although the Fisher children weren’t the only ones who came to school with bruises, they seemed to have them more often than any of the others.

She stood up and went over to her own desk, where she had left an iced cake the day before. Whenever possible she celebrated birthdays. It gave her an excuse to bring in cake for children who never had any at home. She took a clean handkerchief from the pile she kept ready, wrapped the cake, and went back to Agnes’s desk. She raised the lid, intending to tuck the cake into the back of the desk as a

surprise, and stopped in mid-motion. Pushed into the far corner was a photograph. When she lifted it, she discovered more. Four in all.

The top one was a stereoscopic photograph, a staged studio portrait of a young man in formal attire, who was about to embrace a woman dressed as a maid. Both of the faces had been scratched out. The maid's back was to the camera and she was nude except for apron strings and gartered stockings. The man was naked from the waist down and was in a state of extreme sexual arousal. The caption at the bottom read, *Mr. Newly-wed meets the new maid* .

Miss Slade was no prude, but neither was she a woman of the world and she felt herself turn hot with embarrassment. She could not imagine how such a photograph had ended up in the desk of one of her pupils.

She looked at the second card, which was a single, hand-tinted photograph of a beautifully gowned baby in its cradle. At first glance, the infant appeared to be sleeping peacefully, but the photograph was bordered in black, signifying death. Along the bottom, the caption read, *CALLED TO JESUS in the year of Our Lord, 1895* . She turned the card over.

Somebody had printed words that made her gasp. Even she, a professed atheist, was not immune to such appalling blasphemy.

The third photograph was of a young man, naked except for an absurd silk turban with an elaborate brooch in the front. He was lying languorously on a Turkish couch. There was a black border around this card as well.

The last card was also a double image for the stereoscope. This caption read, *What Mr. Newly-wed really wants* .

"No!" she whispered and, in shock, she turned the card face down so she couldn't see it.

CHAPTER TWO

As usual, there was a roaring fire in Inspector Brackenreid's office, and cigar smoke, both stale and new, clogged the air. Murdoch waited whilst the inspector alternately drew on his pungent cigar and gulped at a mug of tea that he had fortified with a dash of brandy, "against the cold." Neither Murdoch nor Constable Crabtree had been invited to sit down and so they stood in front of the desk.

"Have you made any progress with the Smithers case?"

"No, sir. Constable Crabtree and I have taken statements from all of the servants and we also spoke to the staff at the funeral parlour, but they all swear they didn't steal the brooch."

"Where is it, then?"

"According to Mrs. Smithers's personal maid, her mistress often misplaces things these days, more so since old Mrs. Smithers died. Apparently, they have a way of showing up in unexpected places at a later date."

"What's your opinion, Crabtree?"

"I'm inclined to believe they are all telling the truth, sir. The house servants are upset at being accused because they have been with the family for a long time."

Brackenreid nodded. "The woman is probably losing some of her slates. By her own admission, the brooch isn't valued at more than ten dollars. Hardly worth making a fuss about. She and her mother-in-law both attended my church, and in my opinion, they were both mad as hatters." He drew on his cigar, remembered his manners, and added, "May she rest in peace."

He blew out a thick smoke ring, which gradually expanded so that by the time it drifted across the desk to Murdoch, he couldn't have put his finger through it however tempted he might be.

"Anyway, I don't want either of you wasting any more time with it."

"No, sir."

Brackenreid emptied his tea mug in one long gulp.

"Crabtree, you can leave. Murdoch, stay on for a minute."

Murdoch felt a twinge of uneasiness. Brackenreid usually went out of his way to avoid private interviews with his detective. On the rare occasion the inspector could find a transgression in Murdoch's performance as an officer, he preferred to administer the scolding in front of others. He wondered what he was going to be chastised for that merited privacy.

As soon as the door closed behind the constable, Brackenreid went over to the fireplace. He took the poker and banged at a recalcitrant lump of coal until flames burst out of it. Murdoch waited, watching while Brackenreid turned to warm his plump buttocks.

"What I am going to show you, Murdoch, must be viewed in complete confidence. Do I have your word?"

Obscene and insolent questions jumped into Murdoch's head, but he replied with sufficient politeness not to give offence.

"Is the matter related to our professional relationship, sir?"

“What?”

“I mean is it pertinent to you as my inspector?”

Brackenreid flushed. “Of course it is, what are you implying?”

He had an all too familiar expression of bewilderment on his face that tended to take the fun out of baiting him. Murdoch sighed.

“I’m implying nothing, sir. Just clarifying matters.”

“You’re going to step over the line one of these days, Murdoch.”

“And what line would that be, sir?”

But he knew he’d come a little too close this time. Brackenreid could fine him for insubordination with no chance of redress if he so desired.

“I beg your pardon, sir. I was distracting you from your purpose. You wanted to show me something. In complete confidence.”

Brackenreid scowled at him, but he went over to his desk, pulled open a drawer, and took out two folded sheets of paper. He handed them to Murdoch.

“Have a gander at these. Give me your opinion. I’m damned if I’ll have one of my officers maligned.”

Murdoch was astonished. The inspector so often acted like a half-drunken sot that he’d long ago lost any respect for him. However, on occasion, he glimpsed the kind of man Brackenreid had been before his habit conquered him. This was such an occasion.

“The top one came first.”

Murdoch removed the sheet of paper from the envelope. The message was typewritten, unsigned.

January 20 '96 Inspector Brackenreid. I feel it is my duty as a citizen of this fair city to draw your attention to the reprehensible actions of one of your officers. I refer to Sergeant Seymour whose behaviour

unbeknownst to you is both wicked and illicit. I suggest you ask him how he spends his leisure time.

Murdoch glanced up at the inspector, who nodded. "Read the next one."

Monday, January 27 '96. Inspector. I have previously warned you concerning the illegal activity of one of your officers. No action seems to have been taken. I will give you one more week. Unless the miscreant is punished I will alert the newspapers and will lay the case before the Chief Constable himself. This will bring shame on the station and the force itself.

"What do you make of them?" Brackenreid asked. Murdoch hesitated. "What on earth are they referring to?"

"How do I know? Could be anything from buying beer on Sundays to stopping his beak at the whorehouse. Depends on what you consider to be wicked and illicit activities."

"Have you spoken to the sergeant himself, sir?"

"No. Frankly, I dismissed the first letter as pure mischief-making, but the second one is more serious."

"I think you should ask him directly, sir. Give him a chance to defend himself."

"Against what, Murdoch? What he does when he's off-duty isn't my concern. I'm not a priest who wants to hear every sin he's ever committed. Did you have naughty thoughts today, sergeant? Did you forget to say your rosemary."

"The term is 'rosary,' sir."

Murdoch knew he should have let it go. Brackenreid smirked and waved his hand dismissively.

"Whatever it is."

"The writer does say 'illegal' in the second letter. That suggests he is accusing Seymour of more than just a sin,

which as you are implying, sir, can be relatively unimportant in the wider view of things."

"I've noted that, Murdoch. That is why I am discussing the matter with you. What is your impression of Seymour? I understand that of all the officers in this station, he is most friendly with you."

Murdoch wondered who had told him that. "To my knowledge, the sergeant is an officer of the highest calibre. He is decent and hard-working."

"Anybody he don't get along with who might want to make mischief?"

"Not that I know of. He keeps to himself, but I believe he is well-respected by the men."

"Damned peculiar business." Brackenreid tapped on the desk. "Anything else you can say about the letters themselves?"

"They're surprising. The fact that they're typewritten, for one thing. And the language is superior even if the intent isn't. 'Miscreant' isn't exactly a common word. Did they come with the regular post?"

"Yes. The second one was in the post this morning. As you see, the envelope is also typewritten and is addressed to me." He frowned. "The writer is out to make mischief, knows the sergeant by name, and has used it. The problem is that even if Seymour is pure as the driven snow, if the writer does send this to the papers, a lot of mud will be flung and some of it will stick."

"Unless the accusations prove to be laughably trivial."

"Somehow I doubt that, Murdoch. There's a tone to the letters. I believe the writer means business. As you say, the words are 'illegal' and 'illicit.'" Brackenreid walked over to the window and looked out. "Snow's starting up again. I'll be happy when we're done with this weather." He picked up a framed miniature from the mantelpiece. Murdoch knew the painting was of Brackenreid's wife. According to the station gossip, Mrs. Brackenreid was consumed by unrelenting

ambition to achieve a high social standing among the Toronto gentry and to that end she led her husband a merry dance. Brackenreid's expression was perplexed, and Murdoch wondered if he were trying to understand what he had once found appealing about the woman he'd married. On the other hand, he could have just been trying to decide if it was a good likeness and worth the money.

"Besides, it is not likely he will admit it."

"Beg pardon, sir."

"Seymour. He's not likely to come right out and admit he's been dipping his wick in the mud pond, is he?"

"I can't say, sir."

"Of course, he won't. He knows he'll be dismissed. He has a position of superiority here. He must be an example."

With a sigh, Brackenreid returned the picture to its place on the mantelpiece. He turned around.

"The sergeant is on duty today. I'll have to speak to him. I'd appreciate it if you would stay, Murdoch, and give me your honest opinion."

Murdoch didn't relish the task. He liked Seymour, and over the years they had formed a friendship, sharing a passion for fast wheels. Last summer they had gone on a couple of bicycling trips with the Toronto Bicycling Club, to which Seymour belonged. Was he the kind of man who had a secret life that could get him into trouble? Murdoch thought it not likely, but to be honest, he didn't know much about the man. He believed he'd been married at one time but couldn't recall when he'd heard that. Now, like Murdoch, he lived in a boarding house.

Brackenreid pulled the bell rope twice and returned to his desk.

"Have you considered the possibility that the letter has been written by somebody in this station, sir?"

Brackenreid scowled at him.

"I'm not an imbecile. Of course I thought of it. That's why I wanted to discuss the matter with you. Any of the

men prone to whinging? Any of them a bit too straight-laced for their own good?"

"I'd have to think about that, sir."

The station had thirty-four constables at all four levels and Murdoch only had a nodding acquaintance with most of them. More familiarity was dependent on who worked on his cases.

"It's the threat of going to the newspapers that I detest," said Brackenreid. "Surely there's enough loyalty among the men that if the sergeant is misbehaving, they would come straight to me and report him, not go through all this cloak-and-dagger nonsense."

"If it is one of our own men writing the letter, I wonder how he knows what Seymour's private proclivities are."

Although the constables might associate with each other when they were off duty, the sergeants would never break rank.

Murdoch decided to float a tantalizing fly on the surface of the pond to see if the old pickerel would take the bait.

Shortly before the end of the year, a new constable, third class, had joined the station. The incident had caused quite a stir because he was replacing Philips, a well-liked young fellow who had been abruptly dismissed. The charge was poor work habits, based apparently on the fact that he had not come into work for three days in a row when he was suffering from influenza. Because Philips had not produced a note from a physician, Brackenreid said he was malingering. According to the unfortunate constable, he was too ill even to consult a physician and couldn't afford to have one come to his house. The inspector was adamant and the lad was cast out. The next day he was replaced by Liam Callahan, an Irishman, who appeared to have stepped straight off the boat and into the job. Rumour immediately ran riot that he was related to the inspector, although Callahan denied it.

"You mentioned loyalty, sir, and that is a good point. All of the officers have been here for two years or more. Except

for Constable Callahan, that is.”

Brackenreid wrinkled his nose at Murdoch as if he committed the impropriety of publicly breaking wind.

“He’s a very good lad. Let’s not make wild accusations.”

“I wasn’t making any accusation, sir, wild or otherwise. I merely pointed out that Constable Callahan is very new here. The issue pertained to loyalty.”

“Yes, well...”

There was a tap at the door.

“Enter,” Brackenreid called and Seymour came into the room. In some surprise, he glanced at Murdoch, who nodded reassuringly at him. Brackenreid cleared his throat.

“Sergeant, I’ve got some, er, unfortunate news to impart to you. I’ve asked Detective Murdoch to be present because the matter relates to the welfare of the station.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Take a look at these two letters. They are dated.”

He handed them to Seymour. Murdoch watched him, feeling like a traitor even to do that.

The sergeant went very still and it seemed to Murdoch that his hand trembled a little. Not that that was necessarily a proof of guilt.

Brackenreid scowled. “Is the accusation true, Seymour? Have you been committing some illegal act?”

“What might that be, sir?”

“I don’t know, sergeant. Anything. Gambling, dancing with whores, stealing apples. You know what the word means.”

The sergeant’s mouth was tight with anger. “If I am being accused of misdoing, I would like to know who so accuses me and of what charge.”

“So would we, sergeant, so would we. Why d’you think somebody would go to the trouble of writing such letters?”

“I don’t know, sir.”

Brackenreid rested his head on his hands for a moment. “You can see, I’m in a deuced awkward spot, Seymour. If the

writer is as good as his word, he will send this to the newspapers and there will be the devil of an uproar.”

“I realize that, sir. But the alternative seems to be to dismiss me. Unless you are in fact asking that I resign. To avoid unpleasantness.”

Murdoch jumped in. “May I make a suggestion, sir? The writer has given us a week’s grace. We might be able to track him down. If we know who he is, we can determine with absolute certainty what the accusations against Sergeant Seymour are and at least he will have a chance to defend himself.”

Seymour looked over at Murdoch. His expression was bleak. He was a man who expected that the sentence had already been made.

Brackenreid fiddled with his moustache, which badly needed trimming.

“Certainly that would be a good move, but there are two hundred thousand citizens in this city of ours. Any one of them could have sent this letter.”

Murdoch didn’t challenge the inspector on the exaggeration. “May I have your permission to investigate, sir.”

“Yes, you may. See what you can find.” Brackenreid drummed his fingers on the desk. He avoided Seymour’s eyes. “In the meantime, until we get to the bottom of the matter, I am going to ask you to remain at home, sergeant. If the unknown letter writer is as cognizant with the workings of the station as he appears, it may mollify him for a while.”

Seymour was also avoiding the inspector’s face. “Is that to be without pay, sir?”

“No, no. A week with pay. If, er, if you are, er, if the charges are true, you will have to repay those wages. How does that sound?”

“I can understand the necessity. But I do have a favour to beg of you, sir.”

Brackenreid nodded.

"Can we put out that I have come down with the influenza? As you say, mud sticks and I don't want gossip going around that I have been up to no good. I may never be able to completely clear my name."

The inspector hesitated, then said, "Yes, we can do that. We'll call it an informal inquiry. Why don't you get your things now? Say you are unwell. You can send for Gardiner to replace you. He and Hales should be able to manage for a few days. Murdoch can get on with his investigation."

"Thank you, sir."

He gave Brackenreid a stiff, formal bow and left. He hadn't once looked at Murdoch after he had made his offer.

The inspector waited for a moment. "Well, Murdoch, what do you think? He seemed very shaken to me."

"Who wouldn't be when faced with that?"

"Yes, you're right of course. Doesn't necessarily mean the poor fellow has a guilty conscience, does it?"

"No, sir. Not at all."

"All right then. Get on with it. See what you can find."

Murdoch stood up. In spite of what he'd said, he was ill at ease. Sergeant Seymour had indeed appeared shaken by the letters, but he'd not seemed surprised.

CHAPTER THREE

Murdoch returned to what he optimistically referred to as his office, a cubicle off the back hallway, next to the cells. He put the two letters on top of his desk. He didn't relish this assignment. He considered the sergeant to be a dedicated police officer who did his work properly, was punctual, didn't drink, appeared clean and groomed, and was fair to the constables under his command. Surely he wouldn't be so foolish as to risk his job for some peccadillo. Murdoch grimaced, realizing what he was thinking. Seymour was right. No matter if you were clean as the fresh, fallen snow currently beautifying the city, mud stuck.

There was a tap on the wall outside. Because the cubicle was too small for a door, Murdoch had hung a reed curtain at the threshold. Through the strips, he could see the outline of George Crabtree. The constable filled the entire space.

"Come in."

Crabtree pushed aside the curtain sufficiently to show his head and shoulders.

"There is a lady out in the front hall who wants to talk to you."

"Who is it?"

"I don't know, sir. She didn't give her name. She said you wouldn't know who she was anyway."

"Did she also refuse to say what she wanted?"

"As a matter of fact she did, sir. A personal matter was all she'd say."

"George, I've seen that expression on your face before. What's wrong with this one? Do I need you to protect me?"

Crabtree looked sheepish. "Not that, sir. It's just that... well, she's dressed sort of peculiar. Not what you'd usually see. But well-spoken."

"I'm intrigued. I'll come out."

He put the two letters in a folder and slipped it into his desk drawer.

The public area of the station was a large room called the hall. Along one wall ran a wooden bench where the public could wait while their complaints or misdemeanours were dealt with. A big wood stove in the centre poured out heat into the room. The sergeant on duty sat on a stool behind the high counter and behind him was the telephone and telegram table, manned at the moment by young Callahan. Both men were trying without much success not to stare at the woman who was standing in front of the counter. She was on the short side, slim, with fine features and blonde, wavy hair. However, her features were not the extraordinary thing about her. Her clothes were. She was wearing a loose-fitting, brown tweed jacket, belted at the waist and buttoned at the neck. The hem was at her knees and below it were visible brown pantaloons, also loose fitting, and fastened with narrow bands at the ankle. Her boots, simple brown felt hat, and the portmanteau she was carrying were unimpeachable.

As soon as Murdoch appeared, she spoke up.

"Good afternoon, you must be Detective Murdoch. I wonder if we could talk in private. It is a matter of some urgency."

"Of course. Please come this way."

She walked past him and he followed her along the corridor. Except for the strange garb, she was an attractive woman, still on the younger side of thirty, he guessed. And as Crabtree had said, she was well-spoken. She was also very upset about something.

He lifted aside the reed curtain, indicated the spare chair, and took his place behind the desk. He wished yet again that his office wasn't so shabby. The grey metal filing cabinet behind him could have come from a railway discard yard and the upholstery of the chair she was sitting on had split at the bottom. He'd never quite been able to scrub off the chalk marks on the wall where he'd periodically drawn street maps of the area around the station. The woman, however, showed no curiosity at all about her surroundings. She sat down on the chair, her back straight, her eyes fixed on his.

"May I have the privilege of knowing to whom I am speaking?" he asked.

She thrust out her hand in a somewhat masculine fashion. Her grip was firm. "My name is Amy Slade. I am a teacher at Sackville Street School." She leaned forward slightly and he had the impression of somebody on a diving board, not completely sure if they wanted to plunge into the water. He nodded encouragingly and she relaxed a little.

"Mr. Murdoch, I realize that what I have to ask you is quite unorthodox." For the first time, she smiled. "But as you can see, I am not an especially orthodox person. I have come to you for help because you are a police officer, but I must beg for your absolute discretion."

She suddenly looked as if she were on the verge of losing her composure and he sensed this was not a state that she was particularly familiar with or enjoyed. She was also waiting for an answer.

"Ma'am, I can make no promise until I know why you have come to see me. Of course I will be discreet as the

circumstances warrant, but you must allow me to be the judge of that."

He thought for a moment that she might get up and leave. She studied his face, not hiding the fact that she was assessing him. He didn't speak, allowing her to decide as she saw fit. Finally, she gave a sigh and her shoulders released.

"Very well." She reached down to the portmanteau, snapped open the catch, and took out something wrapped in a white handkerchief. She handed it to him. "Yesterday, I discovered this in the desk of one of my pupils." This time, she didn't watch his face but stared over his head. He was unprepared for what he saw.

A girl, dressed in only a chemise, was sitting on a low chair, her legs spread. The caption underneath read, *What Mr. Newlywed really wants*.

Miss Slade's voice was shaky. "The girl in that picture is my pupil, Agnes Fisher."

Murdoch put the card to one side on the desk so it wasn't directly between him and the young teacher.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. She, er, she is of course painted in such a way as to be almost unrecognizable, but there is no doubt."

"Does she know you discovered it?"

"Yes, I fetched her in immediately and confronted her. She was unable to answer me. By that, Mr. Murdoch, I mean, literally, was unable. She went mute. She could not utter a word." This time she met his eyes. "I should explain that what the photograph depicts is utterly out of character for this girl. She is normally a quiet, withdrawn child, and I fear is not well-treated at home. I cannot convey to you, sir, how distressed I am."

"I can quite understand that, Miss Slade. This is an extremely serious matter. Have you informed your headmaster?"

She looked away and he could see her discomfiture.

"No, I have not. I have become fond of Agnes. However, I do not know, I cannot possibly imagine, the explanation for this photograph, but I am sure Mr. Kippen would have her charged. She will be sent to the Mercer Reformatory. He is not, shall we say, a particularly kind or lenient man."

Murdoch had the feeling that in spite of her matter-of-fact tone, Miss Slade had been affected by the headmaster's lack of kindness. Given her defiant adoption of Rational Dress, he guessed her relationship with the schoolboard would be a strained one.

"And the child's parents?"

"She lives with her father, who is a widower and, frankly, a drunkard. I have not yet decided whether he should be informed. I would be afraid of his reaction."

"What do you want me to do, Miss Slade?"

"Find out who has taken this picture. Agnes must have been coerced. There is no other explanation. The person concerned deserves to be prosecuted."

"You asked for discretion, but if I do uncover the perpetrator, the law will have to be followed. I cannot guarantee anonymity."

She sighed. "I am aware of that. I can only trust that you will be sensitive to the needs of my pupil. If this is made public, she will have no future whatsoever."

"Did she come to school today?"

"No, she did not. I am most concerned about that. Perhaps I should have acted sooner but, frankly, I did not know the best course of action to take."

Murdoch took his notebook from his pocket.

"Her name is Agnes Fisher?"

"Yes."

"How old is she?"

"She will be thirteen this birthday. She has a younger brother, Benjamin, who is also in my classroom. Agnes was held back a year, unfortunately, which is why they are in the same standard now. There is also an older sister who is in

service. I don't know where or what her name is." She fished in the portmanteau again. "These photographs were also in Agnes's desk."

He looked at the other three cards.

"You will have to reverse the mourning card," she said.

"I warn you, it is quite repugnant."

It was, and he winced.

"Is this the girl's handwriting?"

"I am sure it is."

"Why would she keep the cards in her desk where they could be easily found?"

"I'm sure it is a far safer place than her home and they were tucked well into the back." Miss Slade glanced down at her lap. "Unlike some teachers, Mr. Murdoch, I do not believe in inspecting my pupil's desks. A little untidiness can be a result of a creative mind."

That's not what the nuns at Murdoch's school had drilled into him.

Miss Slade handed him a folded sheet of paper. "I have written out Agnes's address, on Sydenham Street. You can get in touch with me at the school when you need to."

"I will do everything I can, Miss Slade." He got to his feet. "Let me see you out,"

She too stood up. "No, no, I am quite capable of walking down a short hall. I won't lose my way."

Murdoch waited until she had left to pick up the photographs. He reread what Agnes had written on the back of the mourning card. How could she know words like that? He hoped she was not also familiar with the sexual acts she described. He turned the card over. The photograph of the dead baby had a simple setting of rear draperies, tinted blue, as was the cradle. The infant was dressed in a white-edged lace gown with matching bonnet. His eyes were closed.

The sweetness of that image was in direct contrast to all three of the other photographs. *What Mr. Newly-wed really*

wants. Murdoch knew the so-called Newly-wed series was very popular, and that, typically, five cards told the story. In the first, a young servant girl and her employer, named only Mr. Newly-wed, are in a kitchen. The man, young and dapper, exclaims, *By Jove, I didn't know you were our new maid*, or words to that effect. In the second photograph, he embraces her, but she leaves tell-tale floury hand-prints on his jacket, which are seen in the third image. Next picture, his wife sees this evidence of misbehaviour and orders the maid out of the house. Final picture is, *Mrs. Newly-wed's new maid*. This servant was always an ugly woman or a coloured wench, presumably unattractive to the lustful Mr. Newly-wed.

Murdoch examined the version, not commonly sold, that was in front of him. A doorway to the left offered a partial view of a dining room with flock wall covering and a patterned rug. A row of china plates sat on a shelf and above them a half-seen painting of two sporting dogs. To the right was a large clock, the hands standing at five minutes to five. The floor covering was a striped oil cloth.

Murdoch picked up the second photograph, which was tinted. A naked youth was wearing only a gold turban with a pin in the front holding a spray of ostrich feathers. The pin itself was a silver circlet with brightly coloured red jewels around the edge. He could see that there had originally been five but two were missing. The boy's lips had been reddened and his eyelids coloured violet. His body was slim and hairless and at first glance he seemed a mere child but Murdoch thought his face was too lined for that and his genitals were mature. He put him at about seventeen years of age or even older. A black border around the edge of the card had been carefully inked in.

Lastly, Murdoch turned to the photograph of Agnes, which was also tinted. The girl's cheeks and lips were rouged and her hair was loose about her shoulders, but she was unsmiling and expressionless. She was seated on a low

chair and behind her was a painted backdrop, rather ill-drawn of a panelled room. To her right was an empty birdcage and a bedraggled-looking palm in a pot. To her left, a doorway revealed the end of a Turkish couch draped with a gauzy cloth. There was a leopard-skin rug on the floor.

Murdoch took a magnifying glass from his drawer and began to examine all the ink marks. The writing on the back of the mourning card was clotted with blots, typical of cheap school ink and worn pens. Then he held the glass to the scratches on the two faces in the Newly-wed picture. The gouges were deep, and when he moistened his handkerchief and tried to wipe away the ink, the marks remained. The black ink looked the same as that used on the back of the mourning card, so he assumed Agnes Fisher was the one who had obliterated the faces. Why? So the two people couldn't be identified or because she hated them? The black border around the photograph of the naked youth seemed to also be the same ink.

For the next half an hour, Murdoch went over every detail again of the four photographs, making notes as he did so. On previous occasions, he had been called on to bring charges against young women, always in the theatre, who were supposedly revealing too much leg or bosom. He had always been glad when the charges were dismissed or the young women received only a small fine. Even though they upset some respectable citizens, he saw no harm in what they did. They were of an age to be responsible for their own decisions and mostly, they catered to adult men who rarely got beyond the leer-and-cheer stage. He felt somewhat the same way about the second Newly-wed picture. If grown men and women wanted to take off their clothes and take up lewd poses, that was up to them. Presumably they were paid to do so. The photographs of the two young people were different. Even if the youth was of the age of consent, Agnes was not. He could understand why Miss Slade was so distressed. The way the girl had been

painted and rouged like a tart, and worse, the pose she had been placed in, disgusted him and made him furious with whoever it was had exploited her.

He opened his drawer to take out an envelope and saw the folder he'd placed there earlier and he suddenly felt intensely uncomfortable. Surely, the anonymous letters and Miss Slade's photographs were unconnected. The thought they might not be was disturbing.

CHAPTER FOUR

The skin on the bunion, softened by the long soaking, flaked off easily as Ruby scraped at it with the knife. Mrs. Crofton flinched.

“Beg pardon, ma’am, did that hurt?”

“No, hardly at all. It’s just a little tender.”

“We’re almost done and then you can have the nice part.”

A minute later, Ruby put down the knife, poured a few drops of the oil of bergamot onto her fingers, and began to rub it on the poor deformed feet. The skin felt thin and fragile as paper but smooth and soft from the water.

“Better now?”

Mrs. Crofton leaned back against her pillow and closed her eyes.

“It surely is.”

Mrs. Crofton’s Irish lilt was always more pronounced when she was relaxed. She was seated in the armchair by the fire with Ruby on the footstool at her feet. Tending to her mistress’s corns and bunions had become one of the girl’s tasks and they went through this ritual once a week. The elderly woman’s toes were so deformed that the great one lay, almost at right angles, across the second one. The

remaining toes were crowded together and curled under, making it painful for her to walk for long, even though she wore special, handmade shoes lined with soft fur. In damp weather, the bunions ached.

It was Ruby who had suggested this remedy. She'd heard it from her mother, who one day, out of the blue, had talked about tending to her own grandmother's bad feet. She so rarely spoke about her own childhood that when she did, Ruby paid attention.

What did you do for her, Momma?

I'd make her soak her feet in hot water that had sal-soda sprinkled in it. When the bunion and corns were soft, I'd scrape off the dead skin with a sharp skinning knife. Then I'd rub the entire foot and ankle with warm goose grease. It gave her a great relief.

There had been a wistfulness in her mother's voice, and Ruby had a brief glimpse of the girl she had once been, neglected by everybody except the old lady she took care of. She had rushed to comfort her. *Shall I rub your feet, Momma?* Her mother had grimaced. *Not my feet but you can rub my back.* She had been carrying yet another child. The two pregnancies after Benjamin had both ended in a miscarry, but this one was farther along. Then this child had caused both their deaths.

Ruby poked bits of soft cotton wool between each toe, then slipped on the felt slippers.

"Ah, my dear, you are as precious as your name."

Ruby was not her baptismal name. When she'd applied for the position of general servant, she had decided to change her name. First because she fancied Ruby sounded prettier, second so that she could not be traced. She'd been bold about her references, writing the letter with great care, dictated, she said, by her employee who was now blind and moving away to England. The housekeeper, Mrs. Buchanan, had looked skeptical but when she presented the girl to Miss Georgina and Mrs. Crofton, they had both been charmed.

We'll try her for a month, but in the meantime, give her some good meals, Mrs. Buchanan, she's far too thin.

Six months later, Ruby had more flesh on her bones, more colour in her cheeks, and was happier than she had ever been in her life. Mrs. Buchanan remained rather reserved, but Ruby had become the special pet of her employers, Miss Georgina in particular.

"Shall I fetch your coffee now, ma'am?"

Mrs. Crofton didn't open her eyes.

"Yes, thank you. Is Miss Georgina up yet?" she asked in a drowsy voice.

"Yes, ma'am. She was up betimes, doing some finishing touches."

"Again! I thought she did that yesterday."

"She did, ma'am. I suppose there was still more to be done."

"How ridiculous, I..."

She stopped as her daughter came into the room.

"What is ridiculous, Mama?"

Mrs. Crofton opened her eyes. "The fuss you make over your paintings. Surely even the Master himself declared something completed."

Georgina grinned, not the least perturbed. They'd had this argument many times before.

"We don't know whether he fussed or not. Perhaps the gallery owner wrested the canvas from his grasp and he ran after him with brush in hand. 'No, wait, I have to add a little more cadmium in that corner.'"

She ran across the floor, miming the painter with brush in outstretched hand and both her mother and Ruby laughed.

When she had first met Georgina Crofton, Ruby thought she was the strangest-looking woman she had ever seen. She was wearing a plain holland, ankle-length smock daubed from top to bottom with smears of paint. Her greying hair was braided with a red-and-gold silk scarf and

pinned in a halo around her head. Later Ruby learned that this was what Georgina wore when she was in her studio. She was, she declared immediately, an artist. Her speciality was portraiture, preferably that of the recently dear departed. Usually, she worked from a photograph, but whenever possible she used sketches she made at the deathbed before the corpse was sealed in the coffin. The bereaved family often wanted an embellished likeness that an actual photograph could not provide. Georgina made the beloved look "as they were in life, not the least bit dead." She was successful in this career, accomplished, sympathetic, and discreet. Ruby knew all of this because, for the last four months, she had been Georgina's assistant and companion.

Georgina went over to the birdcage by the fire and clucked her tongue at the canary sitting on the perch. The bird tilted his head and chirruped.

Georgina frowned. "What is wrong with him? For all that he cost, you would think he could sing something."

She went through this ritual every day, and the bird, Rembrandt, only ever cheeped back at her.

"Whose portrait were you touching up today, dear?" asked Mrs. Crofton.

"The baby I told you about who died last month. Not that he needed much improvement. He was as peaceful as if he were asleep. Wasn't that so, Ruby?"

"Yes, ma'am. He was a dear little thing."

"May I see it?"

"It's not dry enough. I'll show it to you later. I promised the parents I'd take it over tonight. I've been too long as it is. By the way, have you done with Ruby? I had a message from a Mr. Guest over on Sherbourne Street. His wife has passed away and he would like me to see her now. It will be a good commission, he has large private grounds."

"Yes, I know the place. He was in trade for a long time. Your father and he were acquaintances. And yes, we're

finished I think, aren't we, Ruby?"

"Yes, ma'am."

There was a light knock on the door and Mrs. Buchanan came in. "Excuse me, Mrs. Crofton, but there's a young lass at the back door. She says she's inquiring after her sister, Martha Fisher by name. She seems to be under the impression she is in service here."

"That's odd." Mrs. Crofton looked over at Ruby, who had turned to wiping out her bowl.

"You don't know her, do you?"

"No, ma'am. I can't say that I do."

"How strange, why has she come here?"

"You have to watch it," burst out Ruby. "She's probably spying out the place for a gang to come in and steal."

"Goodness gracious. Did you leave her in the kitchen, Hannah?"

"Of course I didn't. She's standing outside the door."

"Send her away then."

"Yes, ma'am."

Georgina called out to her. "Wait a moment. At least give the child a few pennies or a piece of bread and butter."

"Not if she's a spy, ma'am. Why should I?"

"Well perhaps our Ruby was being an alarmist."

"No, Miss Georgina," said Hannah. "I've heard from Mrs. Smithers's maid that there have been burglaries in the neighbourhood. Even poor Mrs. Collard, you know, the one who lost her husband just last month, says she's missing her gold filigree earrings."

"Losing a husband and earrings, how careless."

"Georgina, shame on you," exclaimed her mother, but she was smiling.

Ruby concentrated on tidying up her corn-cutting implements.

"Come on, Hannah," said Georgina. "Let's be Christians after all. Suffer little children. Go and give the poor gypsy child some pittance."

“Very well, Miss Georgina.”

She left and Georgina walked over to Ruby and put her arm around her shoulders.

“Don’t look so worried, little sprat. It’s better to err on the side of caution. Such things as you described are not unknown. The girl could quite easily have been a little thief.”

“Yes, ma’am. She could have been, couldn’t she?”

CHAPTER FIVE

The snow had stopped, but the winter afternoon was growing rapidly darker and the chill air burned Murdoch's face. He quickened his pace, huddling into his muffler for warmth. He wasn't much looking forward to questioning Agnes Fisher, especially if she were going to be as uncooperative as Miss Slade had said she was. He turned on to Sydenham Street. Lamps were lit in a few houses, but they were all meagre. On this street few people could afford the luxury of unnecessary candles or lamp oil. The street gaslights were already turned on and they flickered, sickly yellow, making little dint in the gloom. They were widely spaced, perhaps simply because the street was old, perhaps because nobody of any importance lived there.

Number seventy-six was situated in deep shadow between two street lamps. As Murdoch came up the path, he noticed that the upstairs window was clumsily draped with a blanket and a light showed through. He could hear the sound of a baby crying.

Nobody had answered his first knock and he banged the door again, louder. He was about to knock a third time when a voice called from the other side of the door.

"Who is it?"

"My name is Murdoch. I would like to speak to Agnes Fisher."

The door opened and the face of a young woman appeared in the crack. She was not what Murdoch expected, hardly more than eighteen or nineteen and from what he could see, she was pretty, with light brown hair, loosely pinned up. He tipped his hat.

"Good afternoon, ma'am. Sorry to disturb you, but I am looking for Agnes Fisher."

She scrutinized him. "Just a minute, I'll fetch a light."

The door closed with a snap and he wondered if he was going to have to use his police authority to get in. However, in a moment the woman reappeared carrying a lamp.

"Come in out of the cold," she said and stepped back so he had room in the narrow hallway. "Did the school send you?"

He nodded, glad he wouldn't have to go into an explanation. "I assume I am not speaking to a member of the family. You are not Mrs. Fisher, surely?"

The young woman smiled. "No, of course not. I'm Kate... I mean, I'm Mrs. Ralph Tibbett."

Behind her, the baby's wail grew louder and she glanced over her shoulder anxiously. Mrs. Tibbett had the full, lush figure of a woman recently confined.

"I'm sorry if I wakened the baby," said Murdoch. He listened. "Or am I mistaken? Are there two?"

She sighed. "I have twin boys. I had better tend to them." She nodded in the direction of the stairs. "Aggie lives upstairs. She's a good girl," she added, her voice sharp. "Her father is often ill and she stays home to take care of him. If that's what you've come about."

"Did you see her today?"

"No, I didn't, but then the twins have been so mardy all day, I wouldn't have heard Her Majesty herself if she came calling."

The wailing of the two infants was unabated and Mrs. Tibbett hurried toward the parlour door. Murdoch thought he was going to have to find his way upstairs in the dark but suddenly she realized that and swivelled around.

“Do you have matches?”

“Yes, I do.”

“There is a sconce directly at the bottom of the stairs. You can light the candle.”

She went into the front room, leaving him alone. He fished out his box of matches, struck one, and lit the candle. There was barely enough light to see by but it would do. The stairs were uncarpeted and the wall covering was a dingy brown flock. As it turned out, he didn't need the candle to guide him. From above, a man's voice erupted with all the obscene vigour of the very drunk.

Murdoch felt the muscles at the back of his neck tighten. As a child he had been only too familiar with the violence of a drunken man. Even though he had run away when he was twelve years old, the memory was like a perpetual sore that never quite healed. What he had to hold in check now wasn't fear but his anger.

The Tibbett babies had stopped crying and the man was suddenly quiet and in the unexpected silence the only sound was the creak of the stairs. Murdoch halted at the landing. A light shone from under the door to the front room. He gave a short knock on this door and, not waiting for an answer, turned the knob and stepped inside. The air was chilly but pungent with the odour of unwashed linens and spilled ale. A weak fire gave off acrid smoke.

A man was lying on a bed pushed against one wall. He seemed to be asleep, the drunken ranting over. A boy about eleven or twelve years old was seated on a stool drawn as close to the hearth as he could get. He had the gaunt, pasty look of the malnourished, and his hair had been cut so short, he was almost bald. As Murdoch entered, the boy

turned around and jumped to his feet. If there had been anywhere to run, he would have made a bolt for it.

Murdoch smiled at him. "Hello, you must be Benjamin. Your teacher, Miss Slade, sent me. I would like to have a word with your sister, Agnes."

The boy might have been deaf for all the response he gave. Murdoch walked a little closer but made sure he was still blocking the door.

"Do you mind if I warm my hands? It's nippy outside and I forgot to wear my gloves."

Ben shrank away from his spot in front of the fire. There was a grunt from the direction of the bed. Murdoch pointed. "That's your poppa, is it?"

Again, no answer, just the merest of nods. Both father and son were wearing dirty overcoats. Mr. Fisher's neck was wrapped in a red-and-black-striped muffler and his only blanket was a motheaten woman's fur coat. His bed took up most of the space, leaving room for only the small table and a wooden chair in the corner. Along the opposite wall was a narrow cot, neatly made up with a quilt that looked new and clean.

"Is Agnes at home?"

Benjamin shook his head. Murdoch was at a loss. The boy was like a feral dog, so frightened he would fly away at the slightest provocation. Or bite.

"I understand from your teacher you are a very bright boy."

Miss Slade had of course said no such thing, but Murdoch considered all children had that potential. Ben blinked in surprise.

"Did the teacher tell you that?" his voice was almost inaudible.

Murdoch approximated a nod. "Miss Slade seems like a very kind person."

Ben lost some of his wariness. "She gives us sweeties if we get things right. I had two yesterday."

"Butterscotch? That's my favourite."

"No. Barley sugar."

Murdoch sat down on the stool. Ben had backed off to the table.

"I didn't mean to alarm you, son. But I do need to speak to your sister about something important. Do you know where she is?"

"She fainted at school."

"Miss Slade told me that."

"Is she in trouble because she did that?"

"No, not at all. We can't help fainting."

Suddenly, there was a growl from behind him for all the world like a bear woken from hibernation.

"Who the frig are you when you're at home?"

"Good afternoon, sir. My name is Murdoch. Miss Slade, your children's teacher, asked me to come. I was hoping to have a word with Agnes."

Fisher was still so in the grip of drunkenness that Murdoch could see the man try to catch the words as they went by. He repeated what he had said.

"Are you a truant officer?" Fisher asked finally. "I'm always telling that girl...got to get education but she won't listen. Does exactly what she wants. Has she been missing school again? I'll give her what for."

Given what Miss Slade had told him, Murdoch had already decided to wait before he showed the photograph to Mr. Fisher. The man's reaction supported this decision.

"No, I'm not here about her school attendance. It's another matter. She fainted in class yesterday and her teacher is concerned about her."

That was too much for Fisher to comprehend and he lay back on his pillow.

"Wouldn't like to do a man a favour, would you? I'm fair parched. There's some hair of the dog in the cupboard... next room."

Murdoch glanced over at the boy. "Can you fetch it for him?"

Ben scurried away at once, leaving a swirl of smoky air in his wake. Fisher started to cough and he was forced to sit upright. He aimed a gob of phlegm at the hearth but missed. However, the activity had brought him more into consciousness. Murdoch saw there was a teapot on the table with a couple of mugs. He went over to it and lifted the lid. There seemed to be some tea left in the pot. He poured some into the mug and brought it over to Fisher.

"Have a sip of this. It'll wet your whistle."

Fisher accepted the mug, took a gulp, and pulled a face as if it were bad-tasting medicine.

"It's gone cold."

He handed it back to Murdoch, as if to a servant. His hand was shaking. This close to him, Murdoch could smell his rank breath. He couldn't have been much older than Murdoch himself and might at one time have been considered a handsome man. His hair and moustache were brown and his eyes dark. However, his bloated face and puffy eyes and cheeks told their own tale.

Ben came back into the room with a bottle in his hand.

"There's only this, Poppa," he said and gave it to Fisher. Murdoch noticed the boy positioned himself to one side, out of reach of a sudden blow.

Fisher put the bottle to his lips and swallowed down whatever it was. He wiped his mouth with the back of his sleeve and belched. Murdoch actually wondered if this gross display was put on for his benefit.

"That's better," said Fisher. "I'm a Christian again."

And indeed some intelligence had returned to his eyes. He looked at Murdoch shrewdly.

"If her teacher's so worried about Aggie, why have you come and not her?"

"Let's say, Miss Slade thought it better if I investigated." He glanced around the shabby room. "Do you know where

Agnes might be, Mr. Fisher?"

"I don't. I haven't clapped eyes on her since this morning. Ben, where's your sister?"

The boy took an involuntary step back. "I don't know, Poppa. Maybe she went to see if she could find Martha."

Fisher took another long pull from the bottle. "That's my eldest. She's in service somewhere, but the little minx hasn't told us where." He actually grinned. "Makes you wonder if she's ashamed of us, don't it? If Aggie has gone to find her sister, she won't be back for hours. No point in you waiting, Mr....?"

Murdoch didn't answer him. He was only too happy to leave. To remain any longer in this stinking, cold, smoke-filled room was out of the question even though he suspected that Ben would have welcomed it.

"You look like you could do with a bite to eat, Mr. Fisher. Why don't I stand you and Ben to some hot pies for your supper? There's an eating house not to far from here on Queen Street. Allow me to buy you some grub."

"Much appreciated, good sir." Fisher winked. "Couldn't see yourself to stretching to a spot of gravy, could you, mate? Makes the pies nice and moist, and you can hear how dry my throat is."

"I can indeed." Murdoch beckoned to the boy. "Why don't you come out now with me and fetch them. Get your hat."

Ben hurried to do as he said and took an old man's felt hat from a hook on the door. He didn't seem to possess any gloves.

"Shall I tell Aggie you was asking for her?" Fisher asked.

Murdoch shrugged. He knew it didn't matter what he said. Fisher would frighten his daughter or not as he wanted.

"She doesn't know my name," he said. "Just tell her Miss Slade was concerned about her."

"I'll do that."

A unspoken question had hovered round the edges of the conversation Murdoch had had with Miss Slade: Did Fisher know of the photograph or, worse, had he something to do with it? His lack of alarm seemed to indicate no, but Murdoch wasn't going to completely dismiss the possibility, appalling as it was. Men like Fisher had long ago lost all acquaintance with conscience and, without it, could act the innocent convincingly.

Ben was standing at the door watching him anxiously.

"Come on, lad," said Murdoch. "Let's get those pies."

He put his hand lightly on the boy's thin shoulder and led him out of the room. He was gratified the boy tolerated his touch.

CHAPTER SIX

For the past two months, Murdoch had been shamelessly trying to buy the affections of Mrs. Enid Jones's son, Alwyn. Every couple of weeks, he brought him a small gift, another lead soldier for his collection, a bag of his favourite toffees, a new board game. Tonight he was going to give him a sled. He thought this would serve two purposes, gain him more good feelings and, secondly, give him a chance to get the boy outside so they could spend some time together. His motives weren't all self-seeking; he was becoming genuinely much fonder of the boy. He felt more tolerant of Alwyn's resentment and jealousy and he was careful to include him in conversations between himself and Enid. The boy was definitely thawing, Murdoch thought. It was he who opened the door.

"Please to come in. Mamma's upstairs." He eyed the sled, but Enid had instilled him with good manners and he didn't ask about it.

Murdoch didn't tantalize him. "This is for you. One of the constables gave it to me. It used to belong to his son, but he's outgrown it now. I know you wanted one."

Alwyn crouched down to examine the sled. Murdoch had polished the steel runners and rubbed out some of the

scratches on the maple struts. He thought it was almost as good as new, but he knew better than to demand a response from the boy until he was ready.

“How old is the other fellow?” Alwyn asked finally.

“Oh, I don’t know, eight or nine perhaps.”

“I’ll be eight next birthday.”

Murdoch stared down at the boy, trying to determine what he was getting at. Many of Alwyn’s proclamations to him came in some sort of code and he’d learned to be on the alert in order to get the real message.

“Well, I did wonder about that, whether it would be too small, but I thought we could give it a try and see.” In fact, the sled was the perfect size. Alwyn was small for his age and self-conscious about it. “Why don’t we go sledding this Sunday? We can try the riverbanks. They’ll give us a good run, I bet.”

Alwyn shook his head. “Not on Sunday. We’re not allowed to play on the Sabbath.”

Murdoch cursed to himself. Of course he knew that, and Enid’s strict observation of the Sabbath day often irked him. Papists were much more lenient. As long as the faithful went to mass that morning, they could do whatever they liked in the afternoons, especially such wholesome sports as skating and sledding. The priests themselves joined in all the time, tucking their soutanes up into their belts like peasant women.

Enid was coming down the stairs.

“What are you two doing with the door open like that? Do you want to heat the outdoors then?”

Murdoch had been standing on the threshold. “I’ll leave it on the porch,” he said to the boy. “We can decide when to go sledding later on.” He smiled at Enid. “Good evening, Mrs. Jones.”

“And a good evening to you, Mr. Murdoch.”

“He brought me a sled,” said Alwyn.

“And who might ‘he’ be you’re referring to?”

“Beg pardon. I mean, Mr. Murdoch brought me a present.”

“Did you say thank you?”

“Yes.”

In fact, the words hadn’t fallen from his lips, but Murdoch wasn’t about to ruin his chances with the boy by mentioning that now.

Enid caught her son’s hand. “My goodness, Alwyn, you’re as cold as ice. You’ll catch your death. Get on upstairs and warm yourself this minute.”

“Yes, Mamma.” The boy raced up the stairs two at a time. Enid came over to Murdoch.

“Let me take your things.”

He touched his fingers to her neck and she flinched. “You’re freezing too.”

“I’ll be warmer for a kiss.”

She gave him a quick peck on the cheek. He would have liked much more, but he knew she wouldn’t while they were in the hallway where Alwyn might see them. Nevertheless, he put his arms around her and pulled her close to him.

“Is Mrs. Barrett at home, tonight?” he whispered into her hair.

“I’m afraid she is.”

On cue, the door leading to the rear opened and the landlady poked her head through the portieres. Enid moved away immediately and hung Murdoch’s coat on the hall tree. He straightened his necktie unnecessarily.

“Good evening, Mrs. Barrett. How are you keeping tonight?”

“Not well, Mr. Murdoch, not well. This cold weather is terrible hard on us old people.”

He didn’t think she was as old as Mrs. Kitchen, his landlady, but she acted as if she were an octogenarian. According to Enid, Mrs. Barrett had been widowed for more than six years but like Queen Victoria she elected to retain her widow’s weeds. Murdoch had never seen her without

the black bonnet and long veil that trailed down her back. Her gown was of dull bombazine.

"Sorry to hear that, ma'am."

She didn't acknowledge him further. "I want to retire early tonight, Mrs. Jones. No later than nine o'clock. Will you let me know when Mr. Murdoch leaves so I can be sure the door is bolted behind him."

"Of course, Mrs. Barrett."

She sniffed, cast a baleful glance at Murdoch, and backed into her den.

Murdoch followed Enid upstairs to her sitting room. There were several sombre oil paintings hung on the walls, all depicting biblical scenes in which the Jews looked remarkably like modern English gentlemen. They had all been painted by the late Mr. Barrett, a keen amateur artist.

Enid ushered him into a room warm and bright with firelight and lamps. Alwyn was crouched on the rug in front of the fire playing one of his favourite board games, The Prince's Quest. The object of the game was to rescue the sleeping princess in her bower and Alwyn liked nothing better than to play against Murdoch.

"I just made a fresh pot of tea, Will. Would you care for a cup?"

"There's only one thing I'd like better."

He was treading close to the edge by such a remark, but he couldn't help it. Alwyn piped up.

"What is that, Mr. Murdoch? What would you like better than a cup of tea?"

"Two cups of course."

The boy laughed and so did Enid, but then she frowned at him in warning. She was right, and Murdoch felt guilty. He didn't really want the boy to feel on the outside of a secret adult world.

While Enid poured the tea, he went over to the fire. "I was able to get quite a good sled for Alwyn. Maybe we can all go out soon and give it a try?"

"That sounds quite splendid. Do you know I have never been sledding in my life?"

"Ah. I'd be honoured to be the first to show you how."

He wished everything he said didn't sound as if it had some sexual connotation.

"It's easy," said Alwyn. "I've seen the boys at school. You just sit on the sled and go down the hill."

Murdoch accepted the cup of tea.

Enid beckoned to her son. "Alwyn, come. It's time to get ready for bed."

"Mamma, it's too early."

Enid answered him in Welsh and Murdoch saw him swallow his protests. "Will you come and say goodnight to me, Mr. Murdoch?"

"I certainly will."

The boy followed his mother out of the room. Murdoch finished the tea and put down his cup. There was notebook on the table, open at a page covered with pencil marks. Beside it a book, *Isaac Pitman's Shorthand*. Enid made her living as a typewriter and was presently learning to be a stenographer. She seemed to have been practising, for on the first line she had written her name, *Enid Jones*, and some pencil strokes that Murdoch assumed was shorthand. She'd repeated that a few times, then *Enid Llewellyn*. That must be her maiden name; he'd never thought to ask her what it was. At the bottom of the page, she'd written *Enid Murdoch*. He straightened up in shock, certain he wasn't supposed to see that and not at all sure what his own response was.

He sat back just in time as Enid came into the room.

"He's actually very tired," she said. "Will you give a good-night now?"

"Yes, of course."

He went to the tiny box room at the end of the landing where Alwyn slept. He bent over, kissed the boy on the forehead, and said, "Nois da." That was pretty much the

extent of his Welsh, but Alwyn murmured something back to him.

Suddenly, the boy reached up and put his arms around Murdoch's neck and kissed him heartily on the lips.

"Thank you for the present. I'd like to go sledding soon."

"And so we shall."

Murdoch pulled the quilt up, feeling suddenly fiercely protective. Alwyn was a highly strung boy who was shy and withdrawn much of the time. He went to the same school as Ben and Agnes Fisher and, for a moment, Murdoch considered asking if he knew them. But then Alwyn smiled and propped himself up on his elbow.

"Mr. Murdoch, Mamma says I can go to watch the typewriting competition tomorrow. Can I sit beside you?"

"The seat is yours," Murdoch said. "Nois da." He blew out the candle.

When he returned to the sitting room, he noticed that the notebook had vanished. Enid was at her typewriter, the keys clacking.

"Do you want me to time you?" Murdoch asked.

"Later, perhaps."

"There's only one more day to go. How do you feel? Are you nervous?"

"Yes, indeed. I heard today that there's a man come up from New York to compete. He won the state contest last year."

"I can't imagine anybody typing faster than you do."

"It's not just speed. I mustn't make any errors."

He came over to her and put his arms around her. "Enid, you're worse than me when I'm preparing for a bicycle race. All you can do is your best."

She frowned at him. "I don't care about that. I want to win that fifty dollars and the cup. I don't mind at all if I do my worst and win."

He laughed. "Mrs. Jones, the next thing I know you'll be putting sand in your rivals' machines."

He kissed the top of her head. Her hair smelled of the violet-scented pomade she had rubbed in it. She touched his cheek.

"I'm sorry Mrs. Barrett is at home tonight, Will."

"So am I. Give me a kiss to comfort me."

She turned around and he held her tightly. What would it be like to be with her all the time? To not have to leave at the dictate of a bad-tempered landlady, he wondered. The notion was oddly disturbing. Liza had been dead for more than two years now and he'd thought he was ready to court another woman. Now he wasn't so sure.

Enid leaned back and looked into his face. "What is the matter, Will?" She touched his forehead between his eyebrows. "You've got your dark look on."

"Beg pardon, madam."

"Is it a case?"

"That's right," he prevaricated.

Murdoch often told her something about the case he was currently working on, but tonight he couldn't bear to relate the story of the photograph and Agnes Fisher. It was bad enough that it existed. Enid couldn't do anything about it and he knew she would only fret. As far as he was concerned, part of his job was to carry the burden of human wickedness. He wasn't about to share the other personal thoughts either.

She looked as if she were going to protest, but he stopped her with a kiss. Her response was rather cool and she was the first to break away. He didn't insist. But there was something he could tell her.

"Unfortunately, I do have work on my mind." He rummaged in his coat pocket and took out the two sheets of paper that Brackenreid had handed to him. "Enid, I wonder if you would type a sentence for me on your machine. I want to compare something."

It was her turn to seem disappointed, but she made no comment except, "Certainly."

She went over to the typewriting machine.

"Will you type, 'I feel it is my duty as a citizen.'"

She did so, almost as fast as he spoke the words.

"Let me see."

She pulled out the paper and handed it to him. He compared it with the two pieces from Brackenreid. They looked exactly the same. He showed her the letter. "I'm trying to find out who might have written it. The type looks exactly the same as your machine, so that's not much help. It's not like handwriting."

"That's not quite so. All typewriter operators have a different touch, which is fairly consistent." She held the letter up to the light. "The typing is very even, no strikeovers at all, and the print is clean and sharp. I would say the operator is professional and is working from a fairly new machine or at least one that is kept in good condition. I'd wager it's a Remington machine, which is what I have now. My old Caligraph had a different look to it."

Murdoch grinned at her in astonishment. "Well done, Mrs. Jones. Let me see."

He looked over her shoulder, leaning his chin lightly.

"Who uses Remingtons?"

"Most offices do these days."

"All right, madam detective, what else can you tell me about this letter?"

"The paper is copy paper. Look."

She riffled through the tray of blank papers on her desk and picked out two sheets.

"Invariably, good paper has a letterhead. This one is from Mr. Deacon, my last client, a lawyer. I would send that one out and keep a copy for him for his records. See, it's slightly thinner paper that has no inscription on the top. Your letter writer, I would say, therefore, is more likely to be a clerk than a private citizen who would not have much use for copy paper."

Murdoch put his arms around her waist. "How very clever."

She sighed. "I despise anonymous complainers. What do you think poor Sergeant Seymour has done?"

"I don't know."

"Oh dear, let's hope it's not serious. He's your friend, isn't he?"

"Yes, he is."

He released her and walked over to the fireplace, standing with his back to it, his feet astride, hands behind him.

"Let's forget police work...Mrs. Jones, will you be so good as to type a letter?"

She smiled and took up her position at the machine, fingers poised over the keyboard.

"Yes, sir."

"Dear Mrs. Barrett...it has come to our attention that you are retiring early tonight...it is with deep regret that we have heard this news..."

He dropped to his knees in histrionic fashion. "Dear Mrs. Jones, no don't write it down. Dear Mrs. Jones, is there anything we can do for the next hour that is quiet enough not to disturb your landlady?"

"We can talk to each other."

To his dismay, he saw she was serious. There was also no ignoring the feeling he was being punished.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Georgina flung off the black focusing cloth, tipped the camera slightly downward, then disappeared again underneath the cloth. She fiddled with one of the right-hand knobs.

“Ruby, bring that lamp closer to her face. Good, that’s my girl.”

She emerged again, took up the long shutter cable, and pressed the button. After a few seconds, she pulled out the photographic plate, dropped it into her box, removed a fresh plate, and slipped it into the camera.

“I’ll take another one from the other side.”

Ruby waited patiently. Mrs. Guest, the recently dear departed, was dressed for the coffin in a night bonnet of white cambric and her best nightgown. The yoke and collar of the gown were of cream-coloured Valenciennes lace threaded with pale yellow silk ribbons. If, in life, Mrs. Guest had looked becoming in this gown, she no longer did. Her illness had wasted her face to a skeletal thinness and her neck emerged stalklike from the lace collar; her skin had turned a greenish grey, which the pure white of the cambric only accentuated. She smelled dreadful.

“Try the ringlets, there’s a pet,” called Georgina from under the camera cloth. “Let’s see how she must have looked.”

Ruby put down the lamp and went over to the valise they had brought with them. She rummaged through the tools of Georgina’s trade: a pot of rouge, a card pinned with several hair pieces of different colours, two or three bunches of silk flowers. She unpinned the coil of brown ringlets and went over to the bed where the corpse lay. This was the part of her job she enjoyed the least. Rigor mortis had gone, so she was able to lift the head, take off the bonnet, and slip on the band that held the ringlets. The ravaged face suddenly surrounded by shining, luscious curls on top of the wispy, grey hair was grotesque.

“Oh dear. Put the bonnet back on and pull the ringlets around her face. That’s better. Can you turn her this way a little.”

Georgina had rolled the tripod to the other side of the bed. “Step back. Splendid.”

She emerged once again and clicked the shutter.

“That should do it.” She pulled out the plate, held it up to the light for a moment, then placed it with the other one in the box. She pinched her nostrils. “Phew. She’s getting a bit gamey, isn’t she? Do something about it, will you?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Ruby took a vial of chloride of lime from the valise, unstopped it, and splashed a generous amount onto two cotton pads, which she placed on the dead woman’s forehead. The sharp smell temporarily overrode the odour of decay. Georgina had pulled forward a chair and taken out her sketchbook.

“Have they left her rings on, Ruby?”

Ruby reached underneath the sheet that reached to the middle of the dead woman’s upper arm and gently pulled up the left hand. There was a narrow gold wedding band on the

ring finger. Ruby tried not to touch the clammy skin at the wrist but she had no choice.

"Just the wedding ring, ma'am."

"Hmm. My impression of Mr. Guest is that he would relish loading his wife with visible signs of his own prosperity, wouldn't you agree, Ruby?"

Ruby really didn't know what Georgina meant, but she nodded as if she understood completely.

"Have a look on her dresser. See if she has any rings."

The mirror had been draped with black crepe, and for a moment Ruby was startled at her own reflection, a ghostlike shadow in the room. All of the bedroom furnishings were of dark mahogany, and Mrs. Guest had favoured a crimson-and-green flock wall covering with matching curtains and fabric on the chairs. Against the opulence of the room, the bed seemed stark with its white sheets and colourless body. Ruby shivered, partly at the image of herself, partly because the room was very cold. The window was open wide to the frigid winter air and there was no fire in the grate, the better to preserve the corpse. Fortunately, Miss Georgina always worked quickly.

The top of the dresser was neat and orderly, the hair ornaments, arranged on a tray lined with pink satin, were of sterling silver, as was the hairbrush and hand mirror. Both were monogrammed.

"I don't see a ring, ma'am, but there is lovely gold watch."

She held it up. It hung from a heavy gold chain and the front was set with pearls, emeralds, and three diamonds.

"Very good, Ruby. Bring it to me."

She continued to sketch the room as she spoke. When they went to view the bodies, Miss Georgina left behind her strange, mannish clothes, and her navy blue taffeta gown, trimmed with jet, was the essence of propriety. She also insisted Ruby wear dark clothing. *Like a little postulant preparing herself for her marriage to Christ* were her words,

which meant nothing to Ruby. She thought the dull grey woollen waist made her look sallow. She took the watch to her mistress.

Georgina nodded. "Slip it over your neck for a moment. Let me see it against the grey."

Ruby did so. She was surprised at how heavy the watch was, pulling her neck forward. The lamp had been turned up high and the light winked on the jewels. Ruby knew what they were now although before she came to the Croftons' she had never seen so much as a picture of a pearl or an emerald. She longed to look at her own reflection but she didn't dare do so, afraid her mistress would think it vain.

Georgina smiled at her. "I'd wager my life's savings it was a present from Mr. Guest. Let me see." She leaned forward, flicked open the front lid, and peered at it. "Yes. I was right. 'To my dearest Margaret on the occasion of our golden anniversary.'" She snapped the case closed and let it rest against Ruby's chest. "It is a vulgar piece, isn't it?"

Ruby thought she had never seen such a beautiful thing in her entire life but she nodded.

"Yes, ma'am, it certainly is."

Georgina flipped over a page and made a quick drawing of the watch, with arrows pointing to each jewel with a letter to indicate what they were in case she forgot. Ruby believed she herself would remember the design until the day she died.

Her mistress turned back to her original drawing. "What do you think? Is it a likeness?"

Ruby examined the sketch carefully. She had learned that this was the one area where her true opinion was wanted. Georgina Crofton was quite short-sighted. Her portraits, even with the help of a photographic image, were often a little off.

"She has been ill, ma'am. Perhaps in life her cheeks would be rounder and her nose less sharp."

"Quite right, as usual, Ruby."

Georgina made the adjustments. "Goodness I almost forgot. What colour were her eyes? Have a look, there's a pet."

Ruby walked over to the body and carefully lifted one eyelid. "It's rather difficult to tell at this stage, ma'am. But I would say they were brown."

"I'd better ask Mister. People get upset if you have the wrong eye colour. You know how that young couple were with the baby. As if it mattered. I thought all babies had blue eyes."

She blew on her fingers. "It's perishing cold in here. But I'm done. I'm going to give the painting a drawing-room setting so we had better go down there next."

"Perhaps they would like to have these photographs behind her." Ruby indicated two photographs in carved silver frames that were on the mantelpiece.

"As long as they weren't taken by Mr. Notman. Why should I advertise for him?"

William Notman was developing a reputation in Toronto for his photographs, and although he didn't do the same kind of work Georgina did, she had a bee in her bonnet about him. "Uncouth, my pet. People want pretty pictures, not that nonsense."

"They are from Mr. Krieghoff's studio, ma'am." In one of the photographs, a much younger Mrs. Guest sat in a chair holding a baby in a long christening gown. Behind her was Mr. Guest, moustached, portly, obviously proprietorial. The second portrait was more recent. Again Mrs. Guest was seated in the centre, but now there were six others behind her who looked as if they were further offspring. Three small children sat at their feet.

"In that case I will include it. A very good suggestion, Ruby." Georgina started to gather up her things. "We'll leave the tripod. The butler can bring it down. But let's take the box with us. I don't trust anybody not to drop it."

She stuffed her sketchbook into the valise while Ruby went to get the box.

At the door, Georgina turned. She laughed. "I think you had better return the watch to the dresser. You don't want them sending a constable after us, do you?"

Ruby turned bright red. She hadn't forgotten about the watch around her neck. How could she? She had wanted to enjoy wearing it for a few more moments. Quickly she took it off and replaced it in its satin bed. Lugging the heavy box, she followed Georgina from the room.

She'd noticed her mistress slip one of the silver-edged hair combs into her pocket, but she told herself it must be necessary for the portrait.

CHAPTER EIGHT

As soon as he got to the station the next morning, Murdoch consulted the street directory. There were forty-two photographers listed in the city, most of them on King Street in the fashionable shopping district or on the heavily commercial Yonge Street from King as far north as Bloor Street. He could do with some help if he was going to do a thorough investigation, and in spite of what he had said to Miss Slade, he was half inclined to go to Inspector Brackenreid now. He was always balancing on a knife's edge with the man, who would reprimand him one minute for acting too independently and the next tell him off for not taking care of things. By "things," Brackenreid meant anything that might reflect badly on the station or, more precisely, the inspector himself. Murdoch had the uneasy feeling that telling Brackenreid about the photographs would be like putting his hand into a lobster trap. And he knew from experience how sharp those claws were. He could understand the teacher's concern for her pupil, but it was highly unlikely the situation would be resolved quietly. And why should it? He, himself, wanted the perpetrators to be caught and punished. However, he had agreed to begin discreetly, and that's what he'd do.

He took out his chalk and, using the wall as a blackboard, sketched a rough map of the city streets as far as Bay to the west and River to the east, Bloor to the north and Front to the south. Then with the blue chalk he marked the addresses of all the studios that were listed in the directory. How had Agnes met the photographer? Was it through somebody she knew? A chance encounter? Someone who had seen her and thought she was a good possibility? If the latter, then the studio might be in the vicinity of Syndenham where Agnes lived or the Sackville Street School. He doubted she had the means to go far afield. There were two studios that qualified, one by the name of Broom and Company, on Queen Street just west of Parliament, the other, Lofts Photographic Studio on King Street, near Sackville. Both were within a few blocks of Agnes's home. It was somewhere to start anyway.

He pulled open the drawer where he kept the photograph of Liza that he had taken not long before she died. He was in the habit of taking out the picture every day, but yesterday he'd forgotten to do so. He looked at the blurred image, not a good likeness, nowhere capturing the liveliness and intelligence to which he'd been so attracted.

"You would have liked Miss Slade, Liza," he murmured. "She's a woman after your own heart." He touched the glass. Nobody compared to her. He replaced the frame in the drawer and, thrusting his notebook in his pocket, headed for the hall. On the way out, he would see if he could find out something about the anonymous letters.

As agreed, Seymour had stayed off duty and Sergeant Gardiner was at the front desk.

"Good morning, Will," said the sergeant. "Anything we can help you with?"

Here was another situation requiring discretion, thought Murdoch. He was going to become as adept at deviousness as a town councillor.

"Has the morning post been collected yet? I was wondering if there are any letters for me?"

Gardiner pointed with his pen in the direction of the constable.

"Ask him."

Callahan was sorting through the new deliveries, putting them into different piles.

"I haven't seen anything so far, Mr. Murdoch."

Callahan's voice was polite and his boyish face showed his eagerness to please. His brogue was pleasant. Murdoch felt a spasm of unreasonable irritation. He wished he could like the fellow more than he did. It wasn't his fault he was Philips's replacement.

"Is this a typical day? There doesn't seem to be a great deal of mail."

"No, there isn't really. Gets heavier at the end of the month when the tradesmen send in their bills." He finished sorting through the last few letters. "Nothing, sir."

Murdoch leaned over his shoulder, feigning curiosity. "The inspector's correspondence is the majority, I see."

"Yes, it always is. He's forever getting invitations to inspect this or that."

"Do you read the letters first, then?"

"Beg pardon, sir?"

"I just wondered. You seem well-acquainted with the contents."

As far as he could tell, Callahan didn't seem discomfited. "The inspector passes them along to me to answer for him." He indicated the typewriting machine on the desk beside him.

"That thing must save you a lot of time."

Callahan shrugged. "I'm only just getting the hang of it. Eventually it will be faster than handwriting, I'm sure."

"One of my fellow boarders used a typewriter. It didn't look like that one though. What kind do you have?"

"It's a Remington. All the stations have them now."

Gardiner was leaning his elbows on the counter in exaggerated bewilderment.

"I've never before known you so interested in what goes on behind the desk, Murdoch. Not considering a change of position, are you? I'm sure young Callahan would be only too glad to swap. He'd like to be a detective, I bet, get to go out all the time, question pretty young women."

Murdoch decided it was time to leave. "You have a totally false notion of my tasks, sergeant."

He got his hat and coat from the hook by the door, nodded goodbye, and left.

He hadn't gone far when a deluge of rain began. The winter weather had been sliding from damp and mild, with November temperatures, to the bitter cold you'd expect in January. Today was like a chill morning in autumn, and the snowfall of the previous day was already reduced to grey mounds in the gutters. Passersby were huddled under their black umbrellas, coat collars turned up. Murdoch didn't have an umbrella. The unspoken attitude of the police force was that umbrellas were unmanly. No constable was issued one and detectives were expected to show their mettle by braving the elements.

He'd hoped to arrive at the school while the children were out for their playtime, but when he got there, the schoolyard was deserted. The windows glowed with light, warm and welcome in the leaden morning. The building itself was plainer than a bank might be, with no fancy cornices or elaborate carvings. Nevertheless it managed to convey the same air of solidity and sobriety. There was a set of double doors in the centre of the front but on a whim Murdoch went in through the boy's entrance on the right. He walked through the cloakroom, which was redolent with the fug of damp, woollen coats. A man in workman's brown corduroys, a lamp in his hand, came through the door that lead to the corridor.

“Can I help you, sir? Would you be in search of somebody?”

“I would indeed. Can you tell me which is Miss Slade’s classroom?”

The man had a round, ruddy face with full blond side whiskers. He pursed his lips at Murdoch’s question.

“She’d be on this floor. Go through this door. It’s at the far end.” He grinned, showing tobacco-stained teeth. “You can’t miss her.”

If he hadn’t already met Miss Slade, Murdoch would have been puzzled by the man’s leer. However, he knew why it was there and felt irritated. He nodded and went through to the corridor.

He was in a wide hall with classrooms to the left. The doors were closed but he could hear the sound of the pupils chanting their multiplication tables as he went by. A boy was standing outside the third room, leaning against the wall in boredom. He straightened up quickly as he saw Murdoch, who smiled reassuringly at him. Whatever trouble the boy had got himself into, he couldn’t rescue him from it.

Near the far end of the corridor, he realized the reason for the caretaker’s mocking tone. There was an extraordinary noise coming from the room. It was as if it was filled with birds, all twittering and chirping at full volume. However, as he got closer, the sounds abruptly changed into full-throated foghorns, pulsing on the sea air. He looked through the small window in the door. Miss Slade was leading her pupils in some sort of exercise. They all had their hands to their mouths, fingers cupped, and they seemed to be blowing out of the side of their mouths.

She made a chopping gesture and the foghorns died away, then he heard her call out, “Horse.” As one, the children shifted to a chorus of neighs and whinnies that were startlingly real. He might have been listening to a stable of agitated equines. At that moment, Miss Slade caught sight of him. Even from his vantage point, he could

see her blush. She gestured for the children to stop what they were doing and came directly to the door.

“Free practise, boys and girls,” she said over her shoulder, and Murdoch was treated to a veritable barnyard of sounds as she came out to the corridor.

“Mr. Murdoch, do you have news?”

“I went to Agnes Fisher’s house but she wasn’t there. I’m going to check on all photographic studios but I thought I’d come here first.”

Miss Slade frowned. “She hasn’t come to school again today. Her brother says she is staying with their sister.”

Murdoch took out his notebook and pencil. “Do you know where that is?”

“No, I don’t.”

“May I talk to the boy, then?”

Miss Slade hesitated. “I suppose you will have to. I’ll bring him out.”

She went back into the classroom to a momentary pause in the livestock noises. However, they resumed immediately with great vigour if diminishing authenticity. Murdoch stepped to one side and Benjamin Fisher emerged, Miss Slade behind him.

“I’d like to be present if you don’t mind,” she said.

Murdoch knew that what she meant was she didn’t know him well enough to trust him not to be indiscreet, which irked him somewhat. However, he respected her care for her pupils. As for the boy, when he saw who wanted him, he looked as if he would do a bolt right there and then. Any good feeling that Murdoch had purchased with hot pies and gravy the night before had vanished. Murdoch crouched down so as to be more on a level.

“Hello, Ben. I don’t want to take you from your lessons for too long. That sounds amazingly real to me by the way, especially the foghorns.” He glanced up at Miss Slade. “I’m from Nova Scotia and believe me, I’ve listened to lots of foghorns warning off the ships.”

She nodded, but Ben hardly seemed to have heard. He was waiting for the inevitable. The reason Murdoch wanted to speak to him.

"As I told you, I am concerned to have a word with your sister, Aggie. I understand she's missed school again today. Why is that, Ben? Is she not well?"

The boy wouldn't look at him. "She's staying with Sis."

"Does she do that very often?"

"Sometimes when..."

He didn't finish his sentence and he didn't need to. Murdoch guessed that the girl fled the home when things became unbearable with their father.

"Why didn't you go with her?"

Ben, if possible, shrank even more. "Martha only has room for Aggie."

"And where is Martha? I understand she's in service."

"I don't know where she is. She didn't want us to know."

Again his voice tailed off.

"But she told Aggie where she was? Only Aggie, not you?"

Ben's eyes flickered. "That's right."

Murdoch knew he was lying, but he wasn't about to press him. For all the boy's timidity, he had the feeling he had become inured to brutality. If he'd decided not to reveal his sister's whereabouts, there wasn't much Murdoch could do about it. He had no intention of outdoing Mr. Fisher in terms of violence. Miss Slade stepped in.

"Ben, neither Mr. Murdoch nor I mean any harm to Aggie. In fact, it is the opposite. She, er, she might be in some kind of trouble and we both want to help her."

The boy pointed at Murdoch. "Is he a frog?"

"If you mean, is he a police officer, yes he is. I have...I have consulted him because I am worried about Agnes. Benjamin, please answer truthfully, do you know what I am referring to?"

He scrutinized her for a moment, then nodded. "You think she might have one under her apron."

Miss Slade quickly hid her shock at the vulgarity of the boy's response.

"In fact, that was not what concerned me. Aggie fainted because she breathed too much air and she didn't have any breakfast. That is all."

It was Murdoch's turn to speak up. This time, his voice was firmer. Still kind but there was no mistaking that he was reaching his limit.

"Benjamin, what you just said to your teacher was rude. Gentlemen don't speak like that. Please apologize."

The boy was looking so white, Murdoch almost thought he might faint the way his sister had.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Slade. I didn't mean nothing."

"Anything," she corrected him automatically. "You didn't mean anything."

"No, Miss."

"I am in no way asking you to be disloyal to your sister, Ben, but I would like to speak to her, as would Mr. Murdoch. You say you don't know where Martha lives now. But at a guess, where might she be? Was it a grand house like the ones on Sherbourne Street or Berkeley?"

He thought for a moment. "I can't say, Miss. Martha never told us much cos of Pa. She's come back home a couple of times in the beginning and she said it was a swell house and they treated her good. That's all I know."

"How did she get the position, Ben?" Murdoch asked.

"She found a newspaper under a bench."

Miss Slade and Murdoch exchanged glances. "You mean she answered an advertisement?"

"Yes, sir, that's what she did."

Murdoch took the photograph of the baby boy from his envelope and held it in front of Ben.

"Have you ever seen this picture before?"

The boy's eyes flickered, but he shook his head. "No, sir. Passed on as he, the baby?"

"Yes."

Before he left the station, Murdoch had taped a piece of paper over the genitalia of the youth in the other photograph so that he was only visible from the waist up. He showed this card to Ben.

"Do you know this lad?"

"No, sir. Why is he covered up? Is he a prince?"

"I doubt he's a prince and he's covered up because he doesn't have any clothes on."

Ben giggled nervously. "Why not?"

Murdoch decided to ignore the question. "Are you sure you've never seen him? He didn't come to your house ever?"

Ben was on safe ground here. "Oh no, sir. Nobody comes to the house."

Murdoch took the boy's chin in his hand and looked into his eyes. "Are you telling me the truth, son?"

Ben stared back at him but his brown eyes had gone blank, deliberately guileless.

"Oh yes, sir. I ain't never seen either picture before."

Miss Slade managed to bite her tongue and not correct his grammar. Murdoch let him go, unconvinced. "Thank you, Ben. Now, listen to me. I want you to let Miss Slade know the moment Aggie returns home. Will you do that?"

"Yes, sir. But Aggie'll come to school, won't she?"

"She might be afraid to. You will be doing her a great kindness if you tell her that we want to help her. Then let Miss Slade know. Just in case Aggie decides to run off to Martha's again."

"Yes, sir."

"You can go back into the classroom, now, Ben," said Miss Slade.

The raucous attempts at imitation had died down and now there was the ordinary murmur of unsupervised

children. Benjamin did as the teacher told him, but she remained in the corridor. Murdoch could see her distress.

"We'll get to the bottom of this, ma'am, I promise. Even if I have to knock on the door of every photographer in the city."

That comment won him a rather reluctant smile.

"I do appreciate your help, Mr. Murdoch."

"I will report back to you as soon as I can."

She stared at him for a moment, considering some choice he couldn't fathom.

"Just a moment," she said and went back into the classroom, returning immediately with a silver card case in her hand. She opened it. "Here is my card. I would be more than happy if you call on me at my lodgings. I don't mind what the hour. I wish to know any outcome of your inquiries."

Murdoch put the calling card into his pocket and tipped his hat.

"Good day, Miss Slade."

As he walked back toward the cloakroom, he could hear new sounds emitting from the classroom. Somebody was whistling an old folk song, sweet and tuneful as any musical instrument. Given what he had already seen of Miss Slade, he assumed it was she who was creating the sound.

CHAPTER NINE

The first studio was on the second floor above a dry goods store, currently closed down. On each side were boarded-up vacant houses. In an attempt to combat the surrounding air of decay, the entrance to the right of the dry goods store was newly painted and a sign, GREGORY'S EMPORIUM: WELCOME AND COME IN , hung from the doorknob. There was an ink drawing of a camera on a tripod in the corner of the notice. Following instructions, Murdoch went inside. Almost directly in front of the door was a steep flight of stairs, carpeted in rush matting and, in case the customers happened to get lost between entrance and stairs, a second sign was tacked on the wall. A hand pointed upward, underneath it the words EMPORIUM, THIS WAY . Before Murdoch had even reached the first stair, however, a door on the landing above opened and a young man and woman came out. They were laughing and, not seeing Murdoch, turned toward each other. The man grabbed both of the woman's buttocks in his hands, lifting her up to press against him. Murdoch heard a cry of protest that was smothered by the man's hard kiss. Embarrassed at being an involuntary witness to this private embrace, Murdoch called out.

"Good morning, I'm looking for the photograph studio."

He might as well have shot off a gun. They leapt apart and stood staring down at him. He proceeded up the stairs.

"Good morning," he repeated and tipped his hat to the young woman. Her wide-brimmed hat had been knocked backwards by the force of the man's embrace and she straightened it quickly. She was dressed in a fawn-coloured walking suit with a corsage of fresh flowers at the breast. He had on a brown tweed overcoat and a snappy bowler hat. Everything about them said they were newly married.

"The studio is this way, I presume?" he said, indicating the door behind them.

"It is," the man replied. Recovered from his surprise and made a touch belligerent because of it, he pulled his bride toward him and they went down the stairs, his arm around her waist. Their progress was awkward because of the narrowness of the stairwell, but he wouldn't let go of her. She now belonged to him.

On the door was hung yet another sign, GREGORY'S EMPORIUM: KNOCK FIRST. THEN ENTER. In smaller print, *Leave umbrellas in the hall*. A little drawing of a furled umbrella and an arrow aiming in the direction of a stand beside the door. Currently it was devoid of coats or umbrellas. Murdoch glanced around. So far he couldn't say he was impressed with the Emporium. The stairs and hall were dull, no paintings, no wall covering, just a dingy pale green coat of paint. Either it needed redoing or the gaslight was leeching out the colour, which everybody complained it did.

He rapped sharply and went inside. Another young woman, about the same age as the shy bride he had just encountered, was sitting behind a desk facing the door. This one, however, gave him a smile brimming with confidence.

"Good morning, sir. Welcome to the Emporium."

She was dressed in a demure gown of tartan taffeta and her hair was tightly pinned in a knot on top of her head. Murdoch removed his hat and returned her smile.

"Newly wed?"

She looked at him, startled.

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

He jerked his thumb in the direction of the door. "The couple that just left. I'll wager they've just got hitched."

"Oh, yes, you are quite correct. Early this morning, I believe. They wanted to get photographed before they went to their wedding breakfast."

"Lucky man," said Murdoch.

She lowered her eyes to the piece of paper in front of her.

"Quite so. Now as for you Mr....?"

"Murdoch. William Murdoch."

"Are you interested in a wedding portrait?"

Murdoch felt a twinge of warning in his gut. It wasn't that the young woman wasn't professional in her appearance and manner, she was in a rather self-conscious way, but her reaction to his question had been too wary. There had been a momentary flash of cold suspicion in her eyes.

He gave a phony chuckle. "Oh no, ma'am, not me. I haven't had that kind of luck yet to find me a bride. I'd just like to inquire about a photo picture to give to my dear old mother."

She smiled at him. "How very thoughtful of you. A cabinet then." She consulted a notepad in front of her. "We actually have time now. It isn't usually the case, normally we are full up, but there was an unexpected cancellation." She smiled at his good fortune and handed him a card. "Here is a list of our prices. I do recommend you order the package of five. It is more economical."

Murdoch had not really expected this and he wasn't sure how he was going to pay. Or if he could pay. So far this investigation was unauthorized.

"Can you send me the bill?"

“Of course, that is our usual procedure.” She allowed the smallest note of reproach to creep into her voice as if he were impugning the integrity of the Emporium by implying that they were money grabbing.

She stood up. “I’ll fetch Mr. Gregory, our photographer. And will you be so kind as to fill out this form with your name and address.”

“Thank you, Miss...?”

“I beg your pardon, I should have introduced myself. I’m Miss Hill.”

She smiled again, a smile quite as false as Murdoch’s overdone grinning. Then she handed him a piece of paper and disappeared through another door. Ignoring the form for the moment, Murdoch took a look around him. The room wasn’t large, but a tall window allowed good light and created a pleasant airy feeling to the place. Several chairs, nicely covered in burgundy plush velvet, were around the edge of the room, a mahogany coat stand stood by the door, the carpet was a richly patterned Axminster. Perhaps the savings accrued from the sparse furnishing of the entry had been used here where it counted. The walls were lined with row on row of photographs, and Murdoch went to examine them. Gregory’s seemed to specialize in wedding photographs, given the number of portraits of happy couples, sombre for the moment, all dressed in their best. Interspersed here and there were what he assumed were the cabinets, head-and-shoulders photographs of serious-looking men and a few women. He was more interested in the backdrops but at a quick inspection, he didn’t see the artificial wood panelling or the leopard-skin rug and the birdcage that were in the stereoscopic picture of Agnes.

He had just returned to his seat and picked up the form when Miss Hill returned, followed by a stocky fellow whose hand was outstretched even as he came in the door.

“Good morning, Mr. Murdoch. My name is Gregory. Bartholomew Gregory. At your service, sir.”

He had a strong cockney accent.

Murdoch shook hands. Gregory's grip was vigorous. Despite the formality of his black worsted suit, there was no hiding the fact he had performed manual labour at some point in his youth. His shoulders were wide and sloping and his upper arms filled the sleeves of his jacket. Murdoch could feel the hard calluses on his palm.

"I was actually looking for a Mr. Loft. I understood he had a studio here. He did some good work for a cousin of mine a while back."

Gregory grinned, revealing the glint of a gold filling in his front tooth.

"Dead and gone. Or I should say, Mr. Loft is enjoying a well-earned retirement. I purchased the business a few months ago. Decided to change the name to avoid confusion."

"From over the pond are you, Mr. Gregory?" Murdoch asked, gaping a little.

"*Horn and head*, born and bred to you," said Gregory. "Now I understand from Miss Hill that you would like our cabinet package of five."

"That's right. For my mother." He waved vaguely at the photographs on the wall. "But I'd like a nice serious backdrop. Gives a better impression, don't you think?"

"It most certainly does, sir. And you're a man of commerce I'd wager."

"How'd you ever guess that? Let's just say I'm interested in the typewriting business."

"Good going, sir. Efficient typewriters are in great demand. I don't know what I'd do without Miss Hill."

The young woman had returned to the desk but she nodded an acknowledgement.

Gregory gestured. "Why don't we step right out and get started?"

They were interrupted by the door to the hall banging open. A young man came in with such a flurry, he might

have been propelled by the wind. He was carrying an umbrella that he immediately started to shake, scattering raindrops like a wet dog.

“Frigging weather...”

He stopped in mid-sentence when he saw the room was occupied. “Oh, I beg your pardon.”

Gregory barely acknowledged his presence and made no attempt to introduce him.

“You can put your bat and moat on the stand, Mr. Murdoch,” he said. “Come this way.”

The newcomer stood where he was. Not a customer obviously. A handsome young man by any standards, with his dark hair and trim moustache. Murdoch thought he might be Miss Hill’s suitor, but she didn’t acknowledge him either. He glanced curiously at Murdoch, then plopped down in one of the chairs.

CHAPTER TEN

The studio was not much larger than the reception room and had the same impoverished decor of the entrance hallway and stairs. The plank floor was uncarpeted, there was no furniture at all, and the walls were whitewashed. In spite of the three deep windows, the dull light of the rain-soaked day was not sufficient for photographic purposes and two gas chandeliers overhead had been lit. A camera on a wheeled tripod was aimed between two platforms, each curtained off by a curved rod, rather like miniature stages.

“Well, which do you fancy, Mr. Murdoch? You can have your penny dip. This setting here is what we call the Park. An exact depiction of the Allan Horticultural Gardens, which I’m sure you are familiar with.”

He drew back the heavy curtains of the nearest stage, revealing a painted backdrop of depressing ineptitude. The pavilion leaned slightly and looked as if a good gust of wind would blow it away; the few shrubs in the foreground were an odd muddy green and the sky and the dirty clouds looked as if the painter hadn’t bothered to clean his brush. In the centre of the platform was a flimsy wooden plinth, painted to look like a marble sundial.

“Stand here, Mr. Murdoch, if you please. Turn to the right just a titch. Good. Excellent. Don’t move for a tick and a tock.” Gregory went over to the camera and wheeled it to the front of the Park. He disappeared underneath the focusing cloth, moved a little closer, then reappeared. “Now that is a fine portrait as ever hit my peepers. You are most definitely an outdoor man. I must say I would never take you for a man of commerce.”

Murdoch grinned, showing lots of teeth. “But that is what I am, Mr. Gregory, and I think I’d be better off with the indoor setting. What’s that other one like?”

Gregory sighed, just enough to let customers know how foolish they were to question his choice. He pulled back the second curtain to reveal a stage that was bare except for a plain wooden chair in the centre and a small rolltop desk at the back. However, Murdoch could see that the painted backdrop depicted a panelled wall. Something must have shown in his expression because Gregory became hearty again.

“I know it don’t look like much as is, but in a photograph, it is very realistic. You’d think you were in the Prince of Wales’s study.”

Murdoch pointed to the adjacent set of double doors.

“Got anything else back there I can look at?”

“I’m afraid not. That leads to my private birch and broom and the dark room. A dark room is where the plates are developed,” he added.

Murdoch chortled. “Well, I didn’t think it was a place you sat with the lights out.” He walked around the little stage. “It’d be better with carpet on the floor. Have you got any more props or is that it?”

“Course, I do. I’m just setting you up first. Why don’t you sit on the lion’s lair and take the weight off your beaters.”

Murdoch mounted the platform and sat in the chair while Gregory brought the camera over and focused it.

“Yes, yes, that’s better. You were the Isle of Wight. I’d ask you for a loan if I thought I’d get it.” His voice was muffled by the black cloth. “Shall I take the photograph now then?”

“I thought you were going to put down a piece of carpet.”

Gregory’s head emerged. “I was about to get it.”

He headed for a large wardrobe that was in the corner of the room.

“I wouldn’t mind a plant of some kind, pictures, a clock. I’m sure his Majesty don’t sit in a bare room,” Murdoch said.

He could feel the man’s exasperation, but decided it was for show, intended to intimidate him. While Gregory was rooting in the wardrobe, he studied the backdrop. He couldn’t be sure it was the same one that had been used in the picture of Agnes Fisher. There wasn’t much to define either one.

“How’s this mug?”

Gregory was throwing down a fringed rug. It was surprisingly fresh and colourful with a pattern of overblown roses intertwined with lilies.

“Is that the only one you’ve got?”

“Yes, it is. And it’s mint as you can see.” He went over to the desk. “I’ll put these have a looks here like so.”

They weren’t real books, just the outer shells.

“What about some greenery? A fern or one of those leafy plants, asperdasters they’re called.”

“You mean, aspidistras. And no, I don’t have anything like that.”

Murdoch stood up. “Maybe I can look for myself. See what you’ve got.”

Gregory didn’t flinch. “By all means. I want satisfied customers even if it takes all May.”

Murdoch pointed at the windows, which were blurry with rain. “Not likely you’ll get many now.”

While the photographer watched, he walked over to the wardrobe. There was in fact a piece of greenery in there, not the one he was looking for, but a basket of bent and warped ivy. He pulled it out triumphantly.

"See, you did have something. This'll look real good on the desk."

"You're right. Don't know how I overlooked it."

He'd told the truth about the rugs. There weren't any others and Murdoch couldn't see anything else from the stereoscopic photographs. He picked up a clock with the hands perpetually set at ten to three and a framed print of a watercolour that must have been done by the same artist who had painted the sets. He seemed to specialize in dull colours and vague, lopsided shapes. It was only on second glance that Murdoch recognized Niagara Falls.

"These will do just fine," he said and brought them back to the stage.

Without a word but making no attempt to hide his impatience, Gregory took them from him. The watercolour he hung on a nail above the desk and the clock at a point just to the right of the chair. Obviously, they had been placed there before and Murdoch wondered why the man wasn't showing more care. Perhaps it was because he thought Murdoch was unemployed.

"All right then, sir. Sit in the chair and cross your arms. Good. Most impressive."

He stepped out from the focusing cloth and stood to the side of the camera, the lens cable in his right hand.

"Now I want you to keep as still as you can. Don't move a muscle. Look straight into the camera." He pressed the button. "Hold it. Don't move."

Murdoch heard a click as the lens closed.

"Good. We got it." Gregory went to remove the plate from the camera. "Now I could take another for good measure, but that is a cost that has to be born by the customer."

Murdoch got out of the chair. "I'll leave it at that. When can I have the pictures?"

Gregory was all hearty again. "They'll be ready the day after tomorrow at the latest. Now I'd better get on with my work so I'll leave you to settle your till with Miss Hill." He held out his hand. "It's been a pleasure to take you, Mr. Murdoch. I'm sure you'll be quite satisfied."

He was smiling his broad, gold-illuminated smile, but when Murdoch looked into his eyes but saw nothing there but a cold indifference. Gregory averted his gaze immediately, stepped over to the door, and ushered Murdoch into the other room.

"See to this gentleman, will you, my dear," he called to the woman behind the desk and he went back into the studio, closing the door behind him.

"Come and have a seat, sir." It wasn't Miss Hill any more. This woman was older, thin faced with a sharp nose and chin.

"What happened to Miss Hill?" he asked. "She was the one I was dealing with before."

"She's gone to have her dinner," said the woman, apparently struggling to be pleasant.

"Pity. And who might you be, ma'am, if I may be so bold as to ask?"

"I'm Mrs. Gregory. Mr. Gregory, my husband, is the one you have just been with." She had no trace of a cockney accent.

"Very good fellow indeed even if he does talk peculiar. Knows what he's doing all right."

She nodded but without expression.

Murdoch decided to stir up a little jealousy. You never knew what would fall out when emotions ran high. He continued.

"That Miss Hill's a mighty handsome young woman, I must say. Talented too, I'd wager. Does she ever get on the other side of the desk? You know, pose for pictures herself?"

"No, she does not."

"Pity that, with her good looks she'd be very popular."

"I'll let her know your sentiments, sir. I'm sure she will be flattered."

She took a form out of the drawer. "Perhaps I can take your order now and not keep you any longer."

So much for calling on the green-eyed god. Mrs. Gregory had been impervious.

She handed Murdoch the piece of paper. "You didn't indicate which package you wanted sir. I understand it's ten copies."

"Oh no. That's too many for me. Two will do. One for me and one for my mother."

Mrs. Gregory sighed, looked as if she would try to talk him out of it, changed her mind, and dipped her pen in the inkwell. "Two portraits then. That will be three dollars please."

"Whoa back, ma'am. The other young lady said you would send a bill seeing as I don't have a position at the moment."

Mrs. Gregory frowned. "Miss Hill is new here and obviously not familiar with our policy. We require one half payment now and the remainder on delivery of the photographs."

There wasn't any point arguing with that chin and besides he wanted to come back again. He fished in his pocket and took out all the coins he had.

"I've got seventy-five cents here. You'll have to be satisfied with that."

She didn't blink and he regretted he had succumbed so easily. "Given your circumstances, I will make a concession."

She swooped up the money and put it into a cash box.

"Speaking of mothers," said Murdoch. "My dear old mother gave me a stereoscope for a Christmas present and I'd like to buy me some more cards. I wonder if you sell them, seeing as you do photographs."

He was observing her carefully but detected no reaction. Either she was completely ignorant of the possible secondary line of work of the Emporium or she was a consummate actress.

"I'm afraid we don't, Mr. Murdoch. But I understand Mr. Eaton's store has a good selection. You know where he is, don't you?"

"Yes, indeed ma'am. He's right at the corner of Queen and Yonge Streets."

"That's right. Now if you will excuse me, I must get on with my work."

She swivelled around in her chair. There was a typewriting machine on the desk that had been covered before. She inserted a sheet of paper.

Murdoch stood up, retrieved his hat and coat from the stand, and went to the door. The clacking of the typewriter's keys followed him. Mrs. Gregory sounded like an expert typewriter, he thought. Pity he hadn't been able to see what kind of machine she was using. He could have verified Enid's statement that offices were using Remingtons these days.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

“‘Baby baby bunting, your father’s gone a hunting,’” Kate Tibbett sang softly to the twins, whom she was carrying in the crook of each arm. Both babies were teething and her nerves were worn ragged. She had hardly soothed James and got him to sleep when Jacob would wake up, screaming, and within minutes she had both of them crying again. Her arms ached from the weight of carrying them, walking around the tiny bedroom, into the front sitting room and back, round and round. She wished she could have even one hour free, when she could fall into the sweetness of sleep. But there wasn’t anybody to take over. Her family were far off and wouldn’t be sympathetic anyway. *You made your bed, now you have to lie in it* would be her mother’s sour words. But Ralph had pursued her so ardently, he had swept away the misgivings she’d had about surrendering to his passion before they were married. *You should have known*, he’d said angrily when she told him she believed herself to be with child. But she hadn’t known anything, and had brought such shame to her mother and father, she doubted they would ever forgive her.

When they had first moved here, Ralph had been attentive and loving, but as soon as she became clumsy and

heavy with the pregnancy he had spent more and more time away from their lodgings. He'd taken work in an office, he told her, general odds-body, he said, but his allowance wasn't generous and she felt the want more keenly than she could admit even to herself. There were many nights when she cried herself asleep after waiting until the early hours of the morning for him to come home. Since the birth of the twins, his absences were even more prolonged. He said he'd had to take a second job to supplement his wages and was working as a night porter at the Dominion Brewery on Queen Street.

Don't worry, little Kate. I can get catnaps throughout the night and nobody will know.

The extra work didn't seem to tire him out, and on one of the few evenings he was at home, she thought he looked as prosperous as he'd ever been. His worsted suit was of excellent quality, but when she timorously remarked on it, he told her it was a charitable castoff from his employer. His voice was full of reproach. *You don't know how it eats at a man's pride to be forced to accept charity*, he'd said and she burst into tears, stung once again by the feeling that she was to blame.

She halted. Both babies had fallen asleep. Now the trick was to ease them into the cradle without disturbing either one. She bent over and slipped Jacob crosswise onto his end of the mattress. He made little smacking noises with his lips but didn't wake. Carefully, she placed James at the opposite end. They hadn't expected two infants and couldn't afford a second cradle so Ralph had sawed off a piece of wood and made a divider. She kept meaning to cover it with soft cloth but she hadn't yet found the time to do so. Besides, the twins were growing fast and would soon be too big for this arrangement. Looking down at them, she felt a rush of tenderness, something she sometimes feared she would never experience again. She covered them with the quilt that her oldest sister had grudgingly passed on to her. It

was irretrievably stained from previous use, but it was soft and warm and she was glad of it.

She stepped back from the cradle. Rain was pelting against the window and it was so dull and cheerless in the room, she'd had to light a candle. She watched it for a moment, dancing and guttering in the draft from the door, then walked to the window and looked into the grey street. Snow would be better than this, at least after it had stopped falling, the sun would shine and the fresh white snow would glisten beneath a blue sky. She leaned her head against the windowpane and yawned as if she would crack her jaw. She was thankful that at least the room was warm. The brewery workers were allowed to take home buckets of slack from the coal furnaces, and even though the stuff was so dusty it seemed to give off more smoke than heat, it was better than nothing. Also, every time Ralph came home with a bucket, she was relieved she could believe him about his job.

She went back to the bed. Both babies were fast asleep. She lay down, covered herself with a blanket, and closed her eyes. Just a little nap while she could.

She must have dozed off because suddenly she was awake, the babies still sleeping quietly beside her. What had awakened her was the sound of a loud, angry voice overhead. Kate groaned. Fisher had come home and, as was usually the case, he was full of liquor. Sometimes, she knew he ranted at nothing, the bed, the weather, the bedbugs. Mostly though, he yelled at the children. She'd heard Ben go off to school this morning so his father must be shouting at Agnes. She thought about the man who'd come the day before, the one she assumed was a truant officer. In their brief meeting, she'd had the impression he was kind. If the babies hadn't been crying she would like to have lingered, talked to him. From the upstairs, she heard a crash and a bellow from Fisher, then a girl's voice, loud with fear, a shriek. He must have hit her. Light footsteps followed by the

man's heavy tread. Another shriek, then weeping. Fisher's voice continued for a little longer, then there was silence.

She heard the sound of quick footsteps on the stairs and there was a timid tap, tap on her door. She didn't move. There was another tap, then the steps moved away and she heard the front door open.

She pulled the blanket up so that it covered her ears. There was nothing she could do. She had her own troubles to deal with.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Broom and Co., the studio on Queen Street, was so imbued with stultifying respectability that Murdoch wondered how they deigned to photograph anyone who wasn't related to the British peerage. He showed the young man at the reception desk the photograph of the dead infant, making up some story about his uncle being near death's door and could he commission a portrait? The man sniffed and said disdainfully that they did not take such pictures. There were those that did, but he did not know who they were and, he implied, he did not wish to know. Murdoch then asked if they took stereoscopic photographs with stories that were so swell these days and the man almost pulled himself by his nostrils into heaven. *No they did not, indeed.* Murdoch asked to see the studio where the photographs were taken and with great reluctance, the young man did so. The backdrop here was another painted canvas, this one well done, of a park with a manor house in the distance. Murdoch knew it was too early to eliminate anybody from his list, but his instinct was that Broom and Co. were what they appeared to be, snobbish and expensive, catering only to the affluent. He didn't bother to get another set of pictures taken.

He tried one more studio, one nearer to Yonge Street. This place was much less pretentious, owned by a placid older man, Elias Thompson, who seemed to be waiting patiently for customers, his feet on his desk, a cigar in his hand. When Murdoch held out the mourning card, he sighed for the *poor lost lambie*, but said it wasn't his. Yes, there were a few photographers who took these kind of pictures but he had no names to give him. He said he'd seen the series of Mr. Newly-wed and the maid and he thought they were hilarious; very popular as well but too expensive for him to make. Murdoch considered showing him the photograph of the naked Mr. Newly-wed but decided against it. He liked him and shifted him to the bottom of the list as a likely photographer of pornographic images.

He didn't feel he had accomplished much. Of the three photographers he'd met, the one he most disliked was Gregory but disliking a man wasn't a good reason for charging him with issuing obscene material and, so far, he had absolutely no proof that Gregory had photographed the girl. For that matter, all four pictures could have been taken by different people, although he thought that was unlikely. The three stereoscopic cards seemed linked, at least by their obscenity. Discouraged, he decided to visit Seymour's lodgings and see if he could get any further with that investigation.

"River Street! River Street!"

The conductor was calling out his stop and Murdoch sat up. He'd actually been dozing, lulled by the warmth of the streetcar. He went to the rear door and the streetcar halted just long enough for him to get down, then clanged off on its way as if it were a horse anxious for the barn.

The rain had turned to sleet, which was homing into the gap between his neck and his collar. He wrapped his muffler more tightly. River Street was at the eastern edge of the city

limits, and the houses along it were interspersed with vacant lots, all weed covered and dispiriting. Ahead of him, a woman tried to handle her umbrella, two parcels, and at the same time keep her skirt raised above the wet pavement. He was reminded of Miss Slade and her odd but practical trousers. She would have no difficulty manoeuvring through inclement weather. He knew his Liza would have liked her and he felt a mixture of guilt and pleasure. Would Mrs. Jones also like the teacher? He wasn't sure but didn't think there would be an immediate compatibility. For some reason, that made him sigh.

He quickened his pace, about to offer his help with the parcels but the woman turned into the front yard of one of the houses. The door opened even before she rang the bell, a young girl in maid's uniform came out to help her and they disappeared inside.

As he approached the planing mill, Murdoch could hear the thump of the steam engines that drove the machinery. Scott's was obviously in full production, and dozens of logs were piled in the yard waiting to be hauled inside for planing. Murdoch halted in front of the fence, gripped by a surge of nostalgia. Ten years ago he'd had a crib at a logging camp near Huntsville. In spite of the hard work and rough company, he had been happy there. He'd filled out to manhood, physically and emotionally. Only a half-acknowledged driving ambition had pushed him away from that life, until he finally settled in Toronto and joined the police force. Early on, fretting about the lack of opportunity, he'd questioned that choice. Then, three years ago, he had been invited to join the newly established detective department, and he liked that much better. Because he was a Roman Catholic, he knew his chances for promotion were slim, but that was compensated for by interesting work and more freedom than he'd had while on the beat. He even didn't mind being expected to be on call all the time. If he were married, that might cause problems, but he'd have to

tackle that question if and when it came up. And why were his thoughts constantly scurrying back to the subject of matrimony? He was like a dog returning to his buried bone, wondering whether it was time to dig it up and, if he did, whether it would be tasty.

Murdoch glanced around him. The street and yard were deserted. With one leap he was over the low fence. He landed on one of the logs that were lying across the yard, in some places two or three deep. The rain had made the surface slippery just as it always was when the logs were damned in the river. He skidded and almost lost his balance but he bent his knees, flung out his arms, and kept going. Damn, he needed his iron crampons, his boots didn't give him a good traction. Nevertheless, he quickened his pace, almost running now. He'd won the competition two years in a row for fastest crossing. The trick was to be balanced low over your feet and to land squarely in the centre of the log so it didn't roll. A fall was dangerous as the huge logs could shift in the water and deliver crushing blows. Two men had been injured the year he was there, one had succumbed to his injuries and died.

"Hey, what the hell do you think you're doing?" A man had appeared at the loading door of the mill and was glaring at him.

"Just doing an inspection of your goods," called Murdoch. "Making sure these logs are packed in tight, do you want one of your workers to break his leg?" He turned and ran back, hoping he wouldn't slip again and look like a fool.

"What! What inspection?"

Before the man could protest further, Murdoch had reached the fence.

"Everything seems in order," he called and hopped over the fence the way he had come.

"Hey, get back here," yelled the man, but Murdoch got out of sight fast. He was panting but he'd enjoyed the

exercise.

A few houses up from the mill was number 108, and the pounding of the steam engine could still be heard, or felt, more like it—a minor perpetual earthquake rumbling beneath the street.

Murdoch stopped for a moment to get his breath and glanced over his shoulder to make sure the irate watchman hadn't come out looking for him. All clear. He opened the gate quickly and walked up to the door. He'd come here last summer to meet Seymour for a long bicycle ride but then the house had been rather drab, with brown trim and sparse bushes in the small front yard. The door was now a cheery buttercup colour and there were a couple of ornamental stands in the front that no doubt held flowers in summertime. The shiny brass door knocker was in the shape of a lion's head and he lifted the ring that the beast was holding in its mouth and rapped on the door. Nobody responded and after the third attempt, he was about to give up when the door opened a crack and a man peered out.

"What do you want?" asked a hoarse, whispery voice. Murdoch couldn't help the momentary shock at the man's appearance. The entire right side of his face was covered with livid scar tissue from a severe burn, the lips drawn down and revealing the pink inner flesh of the mouth. The fingers of his hand were fused into a claw.

"I'm calling on Mr. Seymour," said Murdoch. When he'd been here previously, a pleasant middle-aged widow was the landlady.

"Who are you?"

"My name's Murdoch. William Murdoch."

"Friend of his or what?"

"Yes."

He didn't elaborate, not wanting to start gossip by revealing he was a detective.

"He ain't in."

Murdoch forced himself to be polite. With a disfigurement like that, the man had a right to be surly.

"Any idea when he's expected back?"

Their eyes met and Murdoch realized the man was probably his own age. The hideous burn marks and the scanty hair across his seared scalp made him seem much older. He grunted, conceding a little.

"He won't be long, he just went to run an errand." He moved back. "You might as well come in."

Murdoch stepped into the hall. A lit sconce threw off a low light, showing plain, whitewashed walls. There was oil cloth on the floor, no druggetts to soften the coldness. The simple, wooden coat tree was hung with a black overcoat and fedora. He had an odd sense of being in a monastic establishment, something else he didn't remember from last summer.

"Does Mrs. Pangbourn still live here?"

"No, she moved out to Calgary a few months ago." The reluctant doorman started to shuffle away. Whatever had burned him must have also broken his leg or hip for he limped badly.

"Are you the landlord?" Murdoch called after him, wanting to engage him in conversation.

But the man didn't answer and disappeared into the room at the back. There were two other doors off the hall, but neither had draped portieres, which contributed to the austere appearance of the hall. There wasn't anywhere to sit and he hovered awkwardly by the door wondering if he should haul the sullen man out of his lair. Then the front door was flung open and in a bluster of chill air, a woman, her long mackintosh slick with rain, burst into the hall. She stopped short.

"Goodness me, it's you, Mr. Murdoch."

Murdoch tipped his hat. "I, er, I regret you have the advantage of me, ma'am."

The woman tugged off the black, mannish felt hat that was jammed low over her brows.

He smiled. "Ah, I do beg your pardon. Good afternoon, Miss Slade."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Amy Slade regarded him apprehensively. "I certainly didn't expect you so soon. What have you discovered?"

"Regrettably, not a great deal. I have not located the photographer." He saw the disappointment in her eyes and he continued hurriedly. "But I do intend to continue the search. I'll find him."

She nodded. "If Agnes does not return soon, I will have to report her absence to the truant officer." She turned away to hang up her wet waterproof. "Ugh. This rubber lining keeps out the rain all right, but you get so clammy, it's hardly any better."

"I am actually here to call on Mr. Charles Seymour," said Murdoch. "I didn't realize you were fellow boarders."

"I gave you my card."

"I must confess, I hadn't taken note of your address."

The man who had answered the door poked his head out of his room. "Oh, it's you, Amy. Is everything all right?"

"Yes, of course, John. Mr. Murdoch and I are acquainted. He is here to see Charlie."

"So he said. Charlie'll be back in a jig."

"It's so dreary out, I think a pot of tea would do wonders. Mr. Murdoch, why don't you come down to the

kitchen. Will you join us, John?"

"No, thank you."

"Come and at least let me introduce you."

John emerged as reluctantly as a maltreated dog comes out of its kennel.

"Mr. Murdoch, this is John Reordan. John, this is Mr. William Murdoch. He works with Charlie."

Reordan brushed the palm of his left clawlike hand with his right and tentatively reached out.

Murdoch also offered his hand, "Yes, I'm acting detective at his station."

Reordan suddenly jumped back. "Are you, indeed? Well, Mr. Acting Detective, I only shake hands with those who earn their bread by the sweat of their brow. You don't qualify." With that he turned and hobbled away.

"John! Don't be so silly," Amy called after him, but he ignored her and slammed his door shut behind him.

She sighed. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Murdoch. I can never predict how he will be."

"It's not your fault. He'd obviously had an unfortunate experience and can't distinguish that from me." Murdoch spoke pleasantly, but in fact he was annoyed by Reordan's behaviour. If Miss Slade hadn't been there, he would have told the man off. "Besides, he's quite wrong, if you were to see me in the height of summer, you'd think I earned my bread by the sweat of my brow."

He was gratified by her laugh, which did agreeable things to her face.

"I would still like that tea you mentioned," he added.

"Of course, come this way."

Murdoch followed her, trying not to stare at her legs. The damp woollen pantaloons were clinging to her calves.

"Please have a seat," she said, ushering him into the kitchen. "I'll stir up the fire."

The kitchen seemed to be the gathering place for the lodgers, not unusual for a boarding house. Murdoch was

struck once again by the austerity of the furnishings. There was a small, scrubbed pine table in the middle of the floor, with four bare chairs around it. Two cushioned chairs were underneath the window. A large cupboard took up most of the space next to the door, across the room from a cooking range. There was the same scrupulous cleanliness he'd noted in the hallway. No plates or cups sat unwashed at the sink. The range was nicely blacked, and the large pot on one of the burners looked quite new. Something that smelled delicious was cooking in it. Amy lifted the lid and took a sniff.

"Potato soup, John's speciality."

"His Irish heritage, I suppose."

She nodded. "I believe that also accounts for his antipathy toward police officers."

"Surely, he's not as disagreeable to Seymour."

"Oh no. They are the best of friends." She smoothed back some stray strands of wavy hair, unnecessarily, he thought. Not much had escaped the tightness of her severely drawn bun. She was an attractive woman in spite of a tendency to be too solemn, and he'd noticed something in Reordan's eyes when he'd looked at her. Murdoch thought the rudeness he displayed toward him, the visitor, might be more personal than historical.

"Is Mr. Reordan your landlord?"

She gave him an odd look. "No, he's not."

"Somebody takes good care of the house."

"We all live here so we all try to be considerate of each other."

For the life of him, Murdoch couldn't understand why the conversation, banal as it was, was making her so uncomfortable, but that was the case. Perhaps it was because she was an unmarried woman sharing lodgings with single men and no landlady to chaperone her.

"Are there other lodgers?"

“Yes. We are four all together. Mr. Timothy Wilkinson also lives here.”

Amy was busying herself with tea making. She took down a teapot from a shelf in the cupboard and scooped three spoonfuls of tea leaves out of a caddy. Murdoch knew Mrs. Kitchen, his landlady, would not have approved of such poor tea making as Amy hadn't warmed the pot first, but he of course made no comment. She brought two cups and saucers to the table. The china was patterned with delicate flowers, gold rimmed and light as eggshells. They looked out of place on the scrubbed surface of the table.

“I think we have some cake if I'm not mistaken,” she said, prying off the lid of a cake tin on the table. She frowned. “I'm afraid not. Somebody has already eaten it.”

So much for mutual consideration, thought Murdoch.

She poured out two cups and he helped himself to milk and sugar lumps. The milk jug and matching sugar bowl were silver.

“I assume it was Seymour who referred you to me,” he said. “I was wondering why you asked for me.”

“Yes, Charlie has a lot of respect for you. I, er, I need somebody with integrity. I was most grateful he could recommend you.”

“So you showed him the photograph?”

Amy sipped daintily at her tea, saucer in one hand, cup in the other, in the manner of the well-brought up.

“No, I did not. It is my opinion that every time somebody looks at that hideous photograph, no matter if their intention is benign, the child is violated again. It was necessary for you to see it, but other than you I would prefer no one else views it.”

Murdoch knew that if the case came to court, which it must if he found the perpetrators, the photograph would be handled and ogled over by many men. He said nothing.

“I simply told him I had a difficult and legal matter to deal with concerning one of my pupils,” continued Amy. “He

suggested I speak to you.”

There was an awkward silence. Murdoch was trying to determine how to proceed without betraying Seymour’s predicament. She rescued him.

“He has told me about the anonymous letters and, as you know, he is currently under a cloud of suspicion. Not of his own making and dreadfully unfair.” She placed her cup and saucer on the table. “I think it’s shameful that some scurrilous person would stoop to such a thing.”

Murdoch liked the word *scurrilous*, which he hadn’t heard before. He’d add it to his vocabulary.

“I agree. If a man in his position is in fact involved in illegal activities, then his accuser should come right out and say what they are.”

To his surprise, he saw Miss Slade turn rather pink. “What constitutes an illegal act is sometimes debatable, don’t you think?”

Murdoch was about to reply that, no, he didn’t think there was any doubt about what was on the statutes and what wasn’t, but before he could wade into that murky water, he heard the sound of the front door opening and people entering.

“That’s probably Charlie now,” said Miss Slade and she stood up and went to the door. Murdoch watched her, curious to see what kind of welcome she was going to give the sergeant. He was a good few years older than she, but he was unmarried after all. And quite eligible as long as he didn’t lose his job.

She poked her head out. “Charlie, we’re in here. Mr. Murdoch’s come to see you.”

Was she giving Seymour warning, thought Murdoch. Was he being overly suspicious?

The sergeant came into the kitchen. He wasn’t a man given to overt expression of feeling, but Murdoch’s quick assessment was that Seymour was glad to see Miss Slade, platonically not romantically, and that his reaction to

Murdoch was ambivalent, a mix of pleasure and apprehension.

“Will, good afternoon to you. Chilly weather, isn’t it?” He stretched out his hand. He was wearing a tweed jacket and trousers with a brown muffler around his neck. The homely clothing made him seem younger, less dour than the police uniform.

Right at his heels was a young man, tall and shambling and extraordinarily hirsute. His untrimmed brown beard covered his face from his cheekbones to the top button of his coat. His hair was thick and wiry and shot out sideward from his head, making him look as if he was standing in a perpetual wind.

“This is Tim Wilkinson. Tim, I’d like you to meet Will Murdoch, one of my colleagues.”

Murdoch hesitated, wondering if this lodger was going to be as rude as Reordan had been. Wilkinson made the same hand-wiping gesture that Reordan had made and immediately offered his hand. In the thicket of his beard, his teeth gleamed in a wide smile.

“Glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Murdoch. Our friend here has spoken highly of you.”

Murdoch smiled modestly.

“Would you two like some tea? It’s freshly made.” Amy removed the cozy from the teapot. It was cups of tea all round, and Seymour and Wilkinson sat themselves at the table, forcing everybody into a sudden intimacy. Once again, Amy took the initiative.

“Just as you came in, Charlie, Mr. Murdoch and I were talking about the letters.”

“Disgusting,” muttered Wilkinson somewhat ambiguously.

Seymour drank some of his tea. “Indeed. Has anything new come up, Will?”

As this seemed to be a household with no secrets, Murdoch didn’t see any point in being unforthcoming.

“Not so far. That’s why I came to see you. I thought we could go over every possibility. Anybody you know who might be carrying a grudge.” He took a sip of tea. “Anything you might be doing that could possibly be construed as illegal.”

His companions reacted as if a shadow had gone across a summer sun, fleeting enough, but sufficient to cause them to stiffen and, ever so slightly, move closer to each other for warmth.

“I think it would behove you to define the term ‘illegal,’” said Wilkinson, his tone belligerent.

Seymour smiled. “You have to forgive my friend here, Will. He is in his second year at Osgood law school. He can’t help himself.”

Murdoch was struck by how much Wilkinson’s words had echoed Miss Slade’s. He was about to launch into a definition, but Seymour got to his feet. He went over to the sink and rinsed out his teacup. When he spoke his back was toward Murdoch.

“Tell you what, Will. I appreciate you have a job to do but I don’t want to take up your time. Obviously somebody has got it in for me and is trying to make mischief, but I don’t know who that would be.” He returned to the table. “And despite what Tim says, I’m quite aware of what constitutes illegal activity.” He picked up the other empty cups. “I promise you, my conscience is clear.”

Murdoch could see a barely discernible nod from both Miss Slade and the young lawyer-to-be. They hadn’t uttered the word *Amen* , but they may as well have.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

For the past few days, Murdoch had had the impression that Mrs. Kitchen wanted to tell him something. With hovering guilt about his unsanctified relationship with Enid Jones, he rather expected his landlady was going to give him a little homily about the teachings of the Catholic Church and the dangers of involvement with those who weren't of the true faith. He was braced, therefore, when he joined her and Arthur for one of their regular after-dinner visits. Because Murdoch had to get to the typewriting competition, Beatrice had made an early dinner, going to more care than usual with his meal, an excellent roast, for once cooked to perfection. She'd even prepared his favourite sweet, a rich layered trifle. He was sated, round of belly when they sat down with hot tea in front of the parlour fire. Arthur seemed tired and somewhat withdrawn, but that wasn't unusual as his health fluctuated. Murdoch found himself searching for a topic they could discuss. He often mentioned the cases he was working on as Arthur said it kept him in touch with a world he was no longer part of. This wasn't pure altruism on Murdoch's part. He valued their observations; Arthur with a shrewd analytic mind and Beatrice always practical. However, out of consideration for

his landlady, he didn't mention the photographs and Agnes Fisher. The poison pen letters were much safer territory, and both Mr. and Mrs. listened intently while he'd described Reardon and Wilkinson and what had transpired at the boarding house. He didn't tell them that the fourth lodger was a New Woman. He knew Beatrice was having enough trouble accepting that a schoolteacher was boarding with men, and he felt rather protective of Miss Slade.

"There's a difference between having a clear conscience and being a criminal," said Arthur. "According to the law, I'm a thief if I steal my neighbour's horse. But what if I know that horse is being mistreated and the only way to rescue it is to take it away from its owner? In that case I would say my conscience is clear."

"Your point is well taken, Arthur. All three of them were evasive when I asked directly if Seymour had been doing something illegal. But what that might be, I have no idea."

"Is it possible he is a bigamist?" asked Mrs. Kitchen. "You assumed he is a widower, but what if he's not? What if in his own mind he had excellent reasons for leaving his wife, she was immoral or licentious, for instance? Then he meets this schoolteacher and falls in love with her. Makes an offer of marriage, although he knows he is not legally free."

Both her husband and Murdoch gaped at her.

"Why, Mrs. K., that is an ingenious notion. And who then would be sending the letters?"

"Perhaps his real wife."

"She's got something there, Will. What do you think?" Arthur grinned.

"I must say I didn't detect any hint of romantic feeling between Miss Slade and Mr. Seymour."

"Ah but they wouldn't want you to know, would they?"

"So you think she would be aware of the other wife and marry him anyway?"

"Why not?" said Arthur. "Women can be very foolish if they become besotted with a man."

"And so can men," added his wife.

"It's not the same," said Arthur.

Mrs. Kitchen looked as if she could argue the point but she didn't. "Well, obviously something isn't right and I have every faith that Mr. Murdoch will discover what that is."

Her tone made it clear she didn't want to go on with the discussion. She glanced over at the clock on the mantelpiece, which was just starting to chime six o'clock.

"My, time is getting on. We don't want you to be late. Have you finished with your tea, Mr. Murdoch?"

"Yes, thank you."

Here it comes, he thought and braced himself, although he wasn't sure for what.

Beatrice glanced over at her husband. "Shall I tell him, Arthur?"

"Better you."

"Tell me what?"

Beatrice clasped her hands in her lap. No, it wasn't going to be a lecture about Enid. She appeared too upset for that.

"Mr. Murdoch, you have become a dear friend to Arthur and me over the past three years, a dear friend indeed...Oh Arthur, you have to tell him."

Murdoch waited while Arthur tugged at the nightcap he habitually wore. Finally, he blurted out, "We're going to have to leave, Will."

"Leave? The house, you mean?"

"Yes," Beatrice jumped in. "You know how some doctors believe pure fresh air and rest can bring about a cure of the consumption. By sheer chance, I saw an advertisement in the newspaper that there was a hotel in Muskoka in need of a housekeeper. Apparently, it is rather like a hospital and the guests are all people with the illness. It's right on one of the big lakes and the air is as fresh as if it's just blown in from Heaven. They boast that most of the guests leave there completely cured."

She paused, the unspoken question in the minds of all three of them hovered. Would this apply to Arthur?

"I wrote to them and I heard back a few days ago. They have offered me the position. In lieu of regular wages, they are willing to give us room and board, and Arthur can take the treatment, such as it is." She looked at Murdoch, her eyes bright with unshed tears. "How could I not accept if it means Arthur gets better? But I'm worried about leaving you in the house."

Murdoch jumped up and planted a big kiss on her cheek. "Why this is wonderful news. And don't you dare give a second thought to me. There are other boarding houses, none a jot as good as this one of course."

Beatrice, still discomfited from his display of affection, but smiling now, nodded at her husband.

"Tell him the rest of it, Arthur."

"What we're wondering about is if you'd consider staying on here and sort of managing it for us. With mother working at the hotel, we won't have any large expenses to speak of and we'd like to hold on to this house until such time as we see how I do. We'd both rest easy if we knew you were in charge of the place." He grinned. "You don't have to cook for anybody of course. They can find their own meals or Mrs. O'Brien next door could do for them. If we let out the two rooms, this one and the one next to you that Mrs. Jones had, the income could cover any extra costs quite nicely."

"And we would give you a reduction in the rent for your services."

They were both watching Murdoch's face. He beamed at them. "That sounds like the best offer since I can remember. Of course I'll do it. And forget that nonsense about reduced rent, I'll pay my proper share."

Beatrice frowned at him. "There is no agreement unless you accept the conditions as specified."

He threw up his hands in histrionic resignation. "Very well. I agree. And when, may I ask, are you planning to

leave?"

"They will send us a telegram as soon as a room is available, but according to the letter it could be any day now."

Arthur had been trying to hold back a cough, but it got the better of him and for a few moments, Beatrice and Murdoch were forced to watch him fight for breath. She passed him a handkerchief and he spat out bloody phlegm, then dropped the linen immediately into the bucket of carbolic by the side of his chair. He lay back for a moment. The coughing spells exhausted him.

"Oh Will," he said softly. "I have almost forgotten what it is like to live a normal life. I hear you bounding up and down stairs and I try to imagine the time when I could do the same. I pray, make bargains with God, for just one more moment of that freedom." He tried to smile. "The best the Lord can do is send me a dream. I had one last night, as a matter of fact. I'm on my old wheel again, the Ideal I told you about. And I'm pedalling along Front Street, the wind from the lake is in my face, my legs are strong as a horse's. I'm breathing as deep and easily as I ever used to, not coughing up my own flesh. Oh it was such a sweet dream, I didn't like waking up, I can tell you."

He appeared on the verge of tears and Murdoch felt an ache in his own throat. Ever since he'd moved in with the Kitchens, Arthur had been ill, progressively worse in spite of all his wife's ministrations. Murdoch knew he'd once been an active man because they'd talked about it, but he never complained even when his physical discomfort seemed unendurable. This was the first time Murdoch had ever heard him express such feelings of sorrow and loss for the life he no longer had.

He reached over and patted Arthur's arm. "You'll be back on that bicycle and challenging yours truly here to a race before we know it."

Arthur smiled but the sadness didn't lift from his eyes. "I hope so, Will. I'd even let you win one or two if we could do that."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

By the time Murdoch slipped into his seat, the Mechanics Institute was jammed with people alive with excitement, and the air was thick with the smells of cigar-tainted clothes, pomade, and perfume. The audience had come as well dressed as if they were attending a concert instead of a typewriting competition. Alwyn and Mrs. Barrett had saved a seat for him beside theirs. The boy was in new finery, a navy worsted suit with a red spotted waistcoat. His hair was slicked down and he smelled like soap. He glanced over at Murdoch and frowned.

"They are going to start at any minute."

"Good thing I came when I did then." Murdoch leaned forward and touched his hat to Mrs. Barrett, who responded without much enthusiasm. He knew he would never be in her good graces. Rightfully so, she suspected his intentions with her lodger.

Alwyn glanced at Murdoch. "Your moustache is wet," he said critically.

Suddenly, the electric lights in the hall all blinked off. The chatter stopped abruptly at the unexpected darkness but resumed immediately in relief when the overhead chandeliers lit up again. A man in a formal black frock coat

and dark trousers walked onto the stage and held up his hand for silence. He could have been a man from any profession, dignified and rather arrogant in his bearing. When he spoke, however, his manner and booming voice were that of a circus barker.

“Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to introduce myself. Aloysius Carver at your service and I am here to welcome all of you to the first World Typewriting Competition ever to be held in our noble city of Toronto. We are most pleased to be the host of this exciting event, which has attracted competitors from all over the world, especially our neighbour to the south, where the current world champion, Miss Mae Orr, resides. She is with us tonight, prepared to defend her title.”

A burst of applause from the right side of the audience, where some people were holding small American flags. The maestro bowed at them, then continued, “We have in addition two highly qualified entrants from over the pond: one lady from England and a gentleman from Germany. But best of all, our own fair country is represented by no less than five competitors, two of whom are local residents.”

More applause, this time from the left side. “Yes, five, and all of them capable of wresting away the cup from Miss Orr, even if I say so myself.”

He turned and signalled to a man standing at the rear of the stage who immediately pulled away a black cloth draped over a table. Three large, gleaming silver trophies were revealed.

“These are for the competitors who finish in the top three places. In addition each will receive fifty, thirty, and twenty-five dollars respectively. Five runners up will receive a cheque for ten dollars, courtesy of the Remington typewriting company...”

“Mamma truly needs that money,” Alwyn whispered in a worried voice.

“Let me explain the rules to you who are uninitiated. The competition is divided into two parts. The first is a fifteen-minute dictation from a text that has been kept secret from the competitors. We can’t give anybody a chance to practise. After that the papers will be collected and our honourable judges, who are at the moment also backstage, and who are all members of our Board of Commerce, will carefully mark and grade the papers. Marks will be deducted for strikeovers, uneven typing, too many words on the line. While they are doing that, the competitors will be given a text to copy, the same for all and also unknown. After fifteen minutes, our timer will ring his bell...Mr. Briggs, if you please.”

His assistant dinged the button on the large brass bell in front of him.

“When they hear that, the competitors must stop at once. Anybody observed making even *one* more stroke after the bell has sounded will be disqualified. I’m sure all you people with keen eyes and wits will make sure there is no cheating.”

There was a chorus of *right on, yes, we will*, not all good-natured, Murdoch thought. This competition was taken seriously. Patriotic fervour was hovering in the air.

“Those papers will also be marked and while that’s going on, you’ll have a chance to stretch your legs. Gentlemen, may I remind you of the presence of our esteemed ladies, please go outside to smoke a pipe. When the judges have finished we will announce our winners.”

Alwyn crossed his fingers, both hands.

The maestro signalled to his assistant, who in turn beckoned to somebody in the wings. A gangly youth shuffled in, looking self-conscious at being in front of an audience. He was carrying a large clock that he hung on a post standing on the uppermost dais, where the audience could see it. Another nod from the master of ceremonies and out came a florid-faced portly man whose hair was too

long for polite society and whose garish necktie proclaimed him a man of the theatre. He had a book in his hand and Murdoch assumed he was to be the reader of dictation. He climbed to the upper dais as well, perched on a high stool, and bowed his head in intense concentration as if he were about to deliver one of the Bard's tragic monologues.

The stage had been fitted with three risers and on each level were five desks, spaced so that each competitor was visible to the spectators. Beside each desk was a stack of paper.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, allow me to present, Miss Mae Orr from the great city of New York, the United States of America, the reigning world champion typewriter."

There was a loud cheer from the American contingent, polite applause from the rest of the audience, and the world champion walked on stage. She was young, bespectacled, and emanated complete confidence and efficiency. Her navy gown was sensibly loose fitting in the sleeves to give her ease of movement. She sat down at the front desk, acknowledged the spectators with a cool nod, placed her hands in her lap, and waited. She was followed by an assistant, who carried her typewriting machine and placed it with great reverence on the desk.

"Our next competitor, also a former world champion from New York, ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Mr. Frank McGurrin."

To more rousing applause, Mr. McGurrin strode onto the stage. Where Miss Orr was quiet containment, he was noisy exuberance. He grinned at the spectators, called out, "Hi there" to one of his friends, and took his seat at the desk next to his rival. He had no assistant and placed his own machine on the desk, then leaned over and offered his hand to Miss Orr. She shook it with a primness that made it clear she did not approve of such showy behaviour.

"Mamma says she'll win," whispered Alwyn. "She can type up to ninety words a minute."

Murdoch nodded, although the number meant nothing to him. Miss Orr and Mr. McGurkin were the star performers, and as the rest of the competitors were called and made their entrance, they both began their own setups, not waiting until everybody was settled. Miss Orr removed her typewriter from its case, adjusted her chair, and raised her hands above the typewriter keys to make sure she was in the exactly correct position. She looked like a pianist about to launch into a concerto. She checked the stack of paper beside her and moved it an inch closer. McGurkin was doing the same kind of fidgeting. More competitors were introduced and took their places.

"Mamma said she is seated in the second row, third seat in. Oh, here she is."

"Mrs. Enid Jones from Wales, currently residing in Toronto," the master of ceremonies announced. Enid was wearing the grey silk dress that Murdoch liked best. She appeared shy, but there was no denying her attractiveness. Some rude masher at the back of the hall let out a whistle. Alwyn was clapping with all his might and Murdoch joined in. Even Mrs. Barrett softened and applauded vigorously. Enid took her place in the second row. Alwyn looked up at Murdoch and, in the tone of somebody who cannot contain the news, said, "My grandda is quite poorly."

Murdoch was rather puzzled by what seemed to be a glint of pleasure in Alwyn's eyes, but before he could respond, the maestro shouted the name of the next competitor.

"And now a young man who is intent on keeping us all law-abiding, Mr. Liam Callahan, a constable from Number Four Station."

"Good Lord," exclaimed Murdoch.

Alwyn glanced up at him. "I don't think it's fair to have a constable in the competition."

Murdoch didn't know what he meant, but wasn't about to get into a wrangle about it. Why had Callahan, who had

described himself as a beginner at typewriting, entered a competition where the level of skill was bound to be very high?

The rest of the competitors, mostly men, were announced and came out quickly. Enid had positioned her chair and typewriter to her liking and was now waiting nervously for the contest to begin. Murdoch saw her quickly scan the audience, but he didn't know if she saw him or not.

Finally all the nervous scraping and shifting was done with. The impresario looked them over.

"All ready?"

Nods and murmurs. He held up his hand to the actor sitting on the stool. "Mr. Coleman, are you ready?"

"Ready indeed, sir."

He opened his book, the timekeeper checked his watch, and *ping*, the bell sounded.

"*Toronto Called Back*, by Mr. Conyngham Crawford Taylor."

The typewriter keys started to clack. Coleman read beautifully in a rich, deep voice that resonated about the hall. Murdoch assumed the book was chosen because it gave the spectators something to listen to that was mildly entertaining.

Buckingham Palace, London, Nov. 24th, 1891

Sir-In reply to your letter to the Duke of Connaught requesting a photograph of His Royal Highness, for another edition of your work, Toronto "Called Back," I am desired by His Royal Highness to forward you the enclosed photograph. ALFRED EGERTON Colonel, Comptroller of the Household of H.R.H. the Duke of Connaught.

The punctuation in this passage was challenging and one or two of the competitors winced, not sure of

themselves. No one watched the keys, all looking straight ahead, their fingers moving rapidly and smoothly. Then virtually as one they reached the end of the page. With her right hand, Miss Orr took hold of the roller knob at the same time as her index finger unhooked the paper holder. She pushed the carriage from left to right while simultaneously rotating the roller. The typed sheet popped out and landed on the desk behind the typewriting machine. Before it even settled, she had reached down and picked up a clean sheet of paper and inserted it in the carriage. She continued to type with hardly a break in her rhythm. There was a spontaneous gasp from the spectators. This is what they had come to see, the champion in action. Only Mr. McGurkin could make the same manoeuvre. Everybody else, including Enid, turned the carriage, rolled out the paper, put it down, and then inserted the new sheet. Coleman kept reading but already it was obvious most of the typewriters were behind.

“Mamma isn’t going to win,” groaned Alwyn. “I think that’s cheating, don’t you?”

Murdoch could understand his intense loyalty, but he couldn’t see anything wrong with what Miss Orr had done. In fact, it was truly remarkable. On surged the race as Coleman read on. Constable Callahan, obviously not a neophyte, seemed to have hit a rhythm. Enid’s typing was fast and smooth but her page change was too slow and he was afraid she had fallen back. Frank McGurkin was sweating but wouldn’t waste time by mopping his own forehead.

The clock’s minute hand jerked on to the quarter-hour, the bell rang, and Coleman stopped in mid-sentence. As one, the typewriters lifted their hands from the keys. No one was going to risk disqualification.

“Assistants, collect the papers. Make sure each one is numbered.” Maestro Carver addressed the audience. “To guarantee there is not the slightest whiff of favouritism,

each competitor has a number. The judges do not know whose paper they are marking.”

Mr. Coleman got down from his perch, bowed to enthusiastic applause, and disappeared backstage. The assistants collected the papers and the typewriters were stretching their tight necks and flexing their fingers. Miss Orr stayed cool and contained, Mr. McGurrin could now wipe his face. The assistants returned and handed folders to each person.

“At the bell, and not a second before, you may turn over your copy and begin.”

Because the clock was behind them, the contestants couldn’t see the hand approaching the hour but the audience could. Every one seemed to be holding their breath. Then the bell rang, there was a flurry of turning paper, and the typewriting began. This half of the contest was the real test. Miss Orr seemed to be able to open her folder before anybody else and off she went. Murdoch thought Enid had started quickly and he nudged Alwyn.

The boy shook his head. “She won’t win. She doesn’t have her own machine.”

“Maybe she’ll be a runner-up.”

“I pray for it.”

The only sound now was the clack of the typewriter keys and the whirr of carriages sliding. Miss Orr executed another brilliant page change and her supporters clapped. McGurrin was a split second behind her. Nobody else seemed close. Enid appeared tense but she was holding her own and didn’t seem to be doing any overstriking, which would lose her marks. Murdoch watched Callahan, who was focused on the task and appeared to be doing well. As far as he could tell the other competitors were much on a level, although the poor man from Germany inadvertently knocked over his pile of fresh paper, which was disastrous, and he stopped trying completely.

The hand of the clock moved to the next minute. Two to go. Sensing the end, Miss Orr seemed to increase her speed. She could have been a mechanical piece, she was so precise. The spectators could see the clock and as the second hand moved, they began to chant.

“...five, four, three, two...”

“Stop,” shouted the maestro. The bell pinged. Mr. Carver glanced around to make sure no one had slipped in an extra stroke. All clear.

“Collect the papers. Ladies and gentlemen, we will now take a break for at least one half an hour, after which time we announce the winner.”

The competitors stood up, some leaving the stage at once, some waving at friends who ran up to talk to them. Miss Orr was immediately surrounded. Enid went to the wings.

“Mamma says that my grandda might die,” said Alwyn abruptly.

“Is that so? I’m sorry to hear it.” But Murdoch had a premonition of what was coming next.

The boy nodded. “We have to go back to Wales. We’ll be going as soon as Mamma gets a passage.”

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Alwyn's news came as a shock, and Murdoch had a hard time concentrating on the rest of the proceedings. Miss Orr was the winner as expected, with Mr. McGurkin next and the English lady, Miss Wildin, third. To the delight of the partisan crowd, Enid was indeed a runner-up, tying for fourth place with Liam Callahan of all people. After the beautiful cups had been handed out, all the participants mingled with their supporters in the foyer of the hall. Murdoch was waiting until the group of well wishers dispersed, but he also had his eye on Liam Callahan and as soon as he could he went over to him.

"Congratulations, Callahan. What a surprise."

The constable wasn't just surprised, he was jolted and he flushed.

"Mr. Murdoch, what are you doing here?"

"My friend, Mrs. Enid Jones, was in the competition. You both did so remarkably well. I must have misunderstood you at the station yesterday. I was under the impression you were just beginning to typewrite."

A young woman standing close beside Callahan chuckled. "Dear me, no, Liam is quite seasoned, this is his third competition."

“Ma’am,” said Murdoch.

“Er, allow me to present my fiancée, Florence Gripe,” said Callahan. “Flo, dearest, this is Detective Murdoch.”

She clasped her hands together. “How simply splendid. Liam has spoken of you so often. It is a great pleasure to meet you.”

Miss Gripe was a small woman, with a ripe, full figure shown off to advantage in a tightly fitting dark green velvet dress. Her hair was an attractive reddish brown with fashionable front curls and she had fine blue eyes, which she used effectively. She and Murdoch shook hands and she smiled up into his face as if this were indeed a memorable moment for her. Callahan, however, was clearly of the opposite opinion.

“We’d better get going Flo,” he said. He took her by the elbow, and although she looked as if she were about to protest, she allowed herself to be taken away.

“Congratulations, again, Callahan,” Murdoch called out as they hurried away.

He felt a touch on his arm and Enid was beside him with Alwyn.

“I wondered if you would know him,” she said. “He did very well.”

“I do indeed. He’s our desk clerk. And the young lady is his fiancée.”

“She’s quite a coquette for someone who’s betrothed,” said Enid. She obviously had witnessed the warm greeting that Miss Gripe had bestowed on Murdoch.

He was saved from answering by another well wisher who took Enid’s hand to congratulate her. He mouthed, “I’ll get your cloak,” and went to collect their outdoor clothes.

Mrs. Barrett had insisted on hiring a cab for them and on the way home, they all went over every detail of the competition, talking about how the others had fared and how Enid had felt each step of the way. Alwyn was holding the small silver cup against his chest. Back at the lodgings,

Mrs. Barrett, in an unusual display of hospitality, offered them a glass of sherry, which they took. That consumed another hour until finally they could take their leave and go upstairs. Here, Alwyn declared he was too excited to sleep so Enid took him on her lap and cuddled him. Murdoch watched them, as they whispered in Welsh, cheek against cheek, laughing together. He'd have to talk in front of the boy or go home without knowing what was going to happen.

"Alwyn says your father is ill and that you will be returning to Wales."

He thought he'd succeeded in keeping his voice neutral, but she jumped and looked at him in dismay, the glow of happiness wiped from her face.

"I was going to tell you, of course, Will. I received the letter only this morning and there was no opportunity. My brother says Da is in some danger and it would be best if I were to go at once."

They both knew what the next question was and Alwyn answered it for them.

"We might not be coming back."

"Is that true, Enid?" Murdoch asked.

She shifted her glance down. "There is nobody else to take care of him."

"Except you who have made your life in another country."

"I am the only daughter. My brothers have their own families. I am the only one who is free of such responsibilities."

Murdoch stared at her, trying to read her expression. She was continuing to focus the top of her son's head. Alwyn kept shifting his gaze between them.

"And is that what you want to do?"

Enid finally met his eyes. "If I don't go, I dread to think what would become of him. He has been in poor health for some time now but he has managed on his own. Now, according to my brother, he has become virtually bedridden."

He has to have somebody watch for him because he has to be turned every few hours as his lungs are so congested. Aled's wife has been doing the best she can, but they have five little ones and it is too much for her."

"So will you stay there?"

She sighed. "I cannot answer that question, Will. I have so few ties here in Canada and so many in Wales."

"You have me."

"Do I?"

"The fact you even ask the question tells me you doubt it."

Enid again averted her eyes. "I saw your expression, Will, when you read what I had written in my notebook. No matter what you tell yourself, you were not happy at my little fantasy."

Alwyn jerked away and looked up at his mother. "What paper, Mamma?"

Murdoch could feel his temper rising, but he struggled for some civility. "Alwyn, I'd like to talk to your mother in private. Will you go to your room for a little while?"

The boy spoke to his mother in Welsh. She answered. He wasn't happy, but after another quick exchange he got off her lap.

"I'm not going to sleep until you come in," he said and left with a sharp closing of the door.

"Thank you," Murdoch said to Enid. "I was finding it impossible to speak freely."

But there was silence between them. Murdoch refused to dissemble by pretending he didn't know what she was talking about. *Enid Murdoch*. She was right. He hadn't been happy. He supposed he could have jumped in and said that he'd reacted only out of surprise, but he didn't know if that was really the case.

"I'm sorry, Enid, I am extremely fond of you but..."

"You don't know if that fondness, as you call it, is enough for marriage. For connection yes, but not for

marriage.”

He was stung by the bitterness in her voice. “I was under the impression we were equally desirous of an intimate connection. I’m sorry you seem to think I was merely gratifying myself.”

She got up and walked over to her desk, where she’d placed her typewriting machine, bedecked with the silver ribbon of fourth place. “It doesn’t matter what I think, Will. I have to return to Wales. I have no choice.”

He stared at her back. She had made sure her thick, dark hair was firmly pinned on top of her head for the competition. He’d actually indulged in the pleasurable fantasy of taking out the combs and hairpins and letting her hair cascade around her shoulders. Not much chance of that at the moment.

“When will you go?”

“I’ve requested a passage as soon as possible. At this time of year it shouldn’t be too difficult. Perhaps as soon as Saturday.”

“You’ll go from New York?”

“Yes.”

He stood up. “There doesn’t seem to be anything else to say. I assume you care enough to write to me.”

She didn’t move. “Of course.”

He didn’t want to leave things like this. He should rush over to her, take her in his arms and tell her that he would wait, that he did want her for his wife. But he couldn’t.

“Can I come back tomorrow night?”

“Certainly, if you want to. I should have an answer by then about the passage.”

She sat down at the desk and stared at the typewriting machine.

“Good night then. And congratulations on the competition. You did very well.”

“Thank you. Good night. Nois da.”

He was about to offer her a kiss but her ramrod straight spine was too forbidding and, besides, he felt anything but tenderness.

He left and let himself out into the winter dark.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Honorina Davis was tall and dark-skinned, with long slender hands and feet and a neck as graceful as a swan's. Her mother said their forebears came from the west coast of Africa, but that was a story she'd been told by the man who owned her and there were no more details available. Neither Honorina's mother, Grace, nor her father, Ferdinand, had grown up with their parents but what little family lore they had was treasured and passed down like pieces of rich cloth. All Honorina had known was the city of Toronto where she had been born, and she was so accustomed to the behaviour that she met with all the time, she didn't really question it. Coloured people were not considered to be the same as white people, in intelligence or emotions, and it was a rare person who could bridge that gulf of ignorance. Take Mr. Gregory, for instance. He'd assumed she was illiterate and was surprised when one day, she told him she had gone as far as the fourth standard.

"One of these days, you can sit at the desk if Clara can't do it," he said with a burst of generosity. He actually clapped her on the shoulder as if she were a man. It had never happened though. He was all too aware of how this would look to his clientele. A coloured woman receiving

people, unheard of. So she'd been hired to clean the studio, every evening except Sunday, thirty cents a time. Then, shortly before last Christmas, he'd asked her if she would like to be part of one of the stereoscopic sequences he produced at intervals. He'd pay her twenty-five cents for fifteen minutes of her time. That was most generous, he thought, considering she'd never been before a camera before. All she had to do was tie a scarf around her head, put on an apron, and stand in front of the table pretending to wash a dirty pot. He didn't explain what the story was supposed to be, not out of consideration for her feelings because he didn't expect her to have any, but simply because it didn't occur to him. Honoria soon realized that she was to depict the new maid, replacing the pert and pretty French maid, played by Clara. The point was that she, Honoria, was considered so ugly, she presented no temptation to Mr. Newly-wed. Renaldo, who also worked at the studio, played this part, and Honoria was struck by how much the behaviour of her three cohorts paralleled how they were in their real lives. Gregory's wife, Prudence, who acted the part of the wife, was jealous to the point of irrationality of her husband; Clara would flirt with any male out of baby skirts, and Renaldo behaved as if every woman was put in his path for the express purpose of his gratification. Even Honoria. And therein lay her anguish. He was the only white man she'd ever met who treated her first as female, second as coloured. Initially she was offended by the casualness of his manners, the constant innuendos, the little touches he managed to get in if they were ever in proximity. Then she realized he treated the other women in the same way. The awareness that he spoke in the same tone of voice to Clara as he did to her filled Honoria with a deep, unspoken pleasure.

After the Newly-wed series of views was complete, Renaldo had winked at her. "If this were the real thing, Ria,

my wife wouldn't be so complacent. You're as good a sauce of a girl as I've ever met."

Gregory hadn't shown her the photographs until she asked to see them. He was pleased with them, but he'd made her look hideous. Her front tooth was blacked out and she was wearing a head scarf and apron over a shapeless dress. When she had complained about it, he'd stared at her in disbelief. Renaldo, on the other hand, touched her cheek gently and whispered, "I'm trying to get the old geezer to do the story of Uncle Tom. You'd make a lovely Eliza."

Gregory wasn't interested in that, probably because the suggestion came from Renaldo, but he did do a sequence called "The slave woman's agony." Honoria depicted a woman who was about to be forced to bed by the wicked slave owner, played by Renaldo in padding and false whiskers. In this one, she got to wear a pretty flowered dress. At first, she'd felt uncomfortable that Gregory insisted on pulling the bodice down so low, her breasts were clearly visible. But Renaldo winked and teased her and offered such encouragement she swallowed her protests. Gregory professed himself so pleased he doubled her earnings.

Tomorrow they were going to do another of the Darkie sequences. She'd already done Darkie Wedding, which she hated because they were all made to look ridiculous. The only bright spot was that her "husband" was Renaldo, who had his face covered with boot blacking. He smelled so bad, she had to laugh at him. There was another shoot coming up soon, called The Darkie Ball. She'd talked her brother, Fergus, into being in it, but once again the other parts were taken by Renaldo and Clara, who was complaining bitterly about having to dirty her face.

Honoria went into the studio. She had to put out the props and make sure the stage that they used for portraits was well dusted. The long uncurtained mirrors were dark with the night and she could see her own reflection. Briefly, she looked at herself, and wondered not for the first time if

there was sufficient attractiveness there to draw her a suitor. And who would that be? There were very few coloured people in Toronto and only Nathan Smith could be halfway considered eligible. Honoria knew he'd got his eye on her but her heart didn't leap when she saw him and to her mind, if you were going to be hitched to a man for the rest of your born days, you had better be more partial to him than that. "You're too particular," said her mother. "You'll be left high and dry, my girl." Honoria dreamed of going to America, to New York or Chicago, to find herself a husband, but she didn't know when she would save enough money for the fare or for living there. They had no relatives in the north and she'd be afraid to go south.

Suddenly, her heart jumped into her mouth. She was standing in front of the set, the one Mr. Gregory called "the Prince's boudoir." She had distinctly seen the cover move on the Turkish couch. For a horrible moment, Honoria thought it was a rat under there. She turned around slowly, picked up her broom, and inched closer to the stage. There was no movement from beneath the cover, but there was something under there, she could see the bulge. Far too big for a rat.

"Whoever you are under there, come out and show your face or I'm going to whack you good."

The scarlet cover shot back and the head of a young girl appeared. Her long hair was loosed and tousled about her thin face and she was wearing an outdoor coat.

"Who in the Lord's name are you?" asked Honoria. "And what are you doing here?"

The girl smiled in a placating way. "Nothing bad, I promise. I didn't have anywhere else to go."

"What's wrong with your own home?"

She averted her eyes. "I had a barney with my pa and I didn't want to stay there."

"Well that ain't none of my business. If you think I'm going to let you doss here, you've got another think coming."

Mr. Gregory will have my hide."

"He needn't know. I promise I'll be gone before day break. He will never know."

"Well you are surely the most audacious child I've ever seen in a long time." She glared. "How did you get in? Am I going to get the blame for a broken door, now?"

"No, not at all...the front door wasn't locked." Again, the shifting glance. "I was trying to find somewhere to spend the night and I tried this place. I didn't break in or anything. I just walked in. And it looked so comfy in here, I just crawled under the covers and fell asleep."

"I don't believe that. You telling me the most whopping nailer I ever did hear. Mr. Gregory always locks up himself. He would never not do it."

"He must have been in a hurry. You can go and see for yourself. There is nothing damaged."

"I am not going to let you out of my sight, young lady. You'll do a bunk soon as I turn my back. Besides, how can you be so cruel as to worry your parents so? They must be out of their minds wondering where you are."

"They think I'm staying with my sister."

"And where would she be?"

"She lives with her husband over on the other side of Yonge Street."

"What address?"

Honoria was trying to see if she would catch the girl in a lie, but the child answered promptly and easily.

"Number forty-four, Temperance Street. She and her husband rent the upper floor above the grocery store."

"What's her name?"

"Mary. She was Mary Price, but now she's Mary Slade."

"And what name were you christened with?"

"Lydia."

"Lydia what?"

"Lydia Price, of course, same as my sister."

The girl shivered. The stove was allowed to burn down in the night and the studio was cold.

"Please let me stay. I won't be any trouble, I promise. If I go home, my pa will whack me good."

"I don't care bout that. You must have done something wicked and you deserve what you get."

She paused, giving so-called Lydia a chance to come up with an explanation, which she expected would be a right old whopper. However, she didn't. Whether she knew she wasn't going to be believed or whether her imagination had dried up, Honoria couldn't tell.

She pushed back the velour cover and stood up.

"Hah, you've still got your boots on," Honoria said angrily. "Don't you go dropping mud on that leopard skin. I'll be blamed."

"They were quite dry. But I'll go now. I don't want to get you into trouble."

Honoria knew she was being played on like a church organ, but the child looked so perishing and woebegone, her indignation began to melt.

"You can't stay here, you just can't. Get off on home and say you're sorry. Or why don't you go to your sister's like they think?"

Lydia gave her a wan smile. "You're right. I was being silly. It's not that late, is it?"

"Yes, it is. It's almost midnight." She picked up her candlestick. "Come on, I'll see you to the door."

The girl didn't argue and Honoria walked her through the outer office. She was telling the truth about the door at least. It was intact. And unlocked, which was very unlike Mr. Gregory.

She ushered the girl into the hall and escorted her down the stairs to the street. Once again, she was jolted. As they paused on the threshold, the light from the street lamp fell across the girl's face. This close, Honoria saw what hadn't been obvious in the low candlelight. What she'd taken as

high colour, she saw now wasn't natural. The rosiness of the cheeks was too even, the shadows of the eyelids was too blue. She smelled faintly of scent. Before she could comment, the girl turned and hurried away.

She was a sly one. You don't paint your face like that unless you're up to something wicked. She was nothing better than a doxie. And so young. So very young. She wondered if she should tell Mr. Gregory but almost immediately decided she wouldn't. If you were coloured, you never went to your boss with trouble in your hands. The likelihood was that it would blow right back in your face.

She stared after the girl. Her shoulders were stooped and she thrust her hands into her sleeves for warmth. Honoria shivered in the cold air.

"Wait!" she called.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Dawn was only a lightening of the darkness with no sun at all showing through the grey clouds. Even the snow on the shore and lake looked dingy. Levi Cross wrapped the strips of linen that he used for boots tighter around his legs and hefted his sack on his back. Although the surface of the snow had softened in the brief thaw and rain had pockmarked it, he could still make out traces of the footprints and the swath of something being dragged out on the lake. He'd been scavenging along the beach when he'd noticed them. He grinned to himself. Along this section of the beach, nobody would tramp out onto a frozen lake, dragging something heavy, unless they were up to no good. People were always disposing of things in the winter. Dogs and cats were the most common, but he'd even found a small donkey once, stiff and mangy. Money saved from the farrier by leaving the beast on the ice until spring. Not that finding a donkey did him much good, but the dogs and cats he carried back to his hut on the beach. When they thawed, he skinned them, cured the hide, and cut it into strips. The cat's fur he sewed into scarves, which he sold to gullible women as mink; the dog skins, if they were short-haired,

made good gloves, which he claimed to be kid leather. It was a decent living, all things considered.

The tracks were easy to follow and he could see where two men, for they looked like men's boot prints, had alternately carried and dragged the box. They'd gone to a lot of trouble and he was excited about what he'd find. He could see the tracks returning without the box, so they had left it somewhere. A dog for sure, and a big one at that. Probably the servants being sent to dispose of the dog, a pure breed no doubt, fat and pampered with good skin.

The soft snow made it difficult to walk and he must have trudged for ten minutes before he spotted the chest. It was shoved under the overhang of a short promontory. Snow had been piled around it to hide it, but some of that had melted in the rain and the lid was visible. Levi hurried over and eagerly brushed away the remaining snow. The trunk was wooden with metal ends, the kind used for travelling. It didn't look particularly expensive, and had obviously been well used. It was tied around with an old leather belt. He tugged at it but it didn't move, held fast in the ice now. That didn't matter, he had his tools. He lowered his sack and took out a saw. The leather belt was stiff but it was easy to cut through. He tried to lift the lid again but it didn't move. There was a brass lock and either it was locked or frozen shut. He picked up his jemmy, inserted it under the lock, and started to pry it open. It was hard going, which told him the trunk was locked, not frozen. He grunted and exerted more pressure with the jemmy. Suddenly, the lock snapped open. He tried the lid again. This time he could lift it and he peered into the chest. There was a piece of velour curtain on top of whatever was in there, and he pulled it away.

At first, unable to take in what he saw, he thought he was looking at a large doll. Then he realized it was the naked body of a young boy, curled up tightly into a fetal position. Levi lost his breath for a moment, every instinct telling him to run. Then sense took over. He'd handled many

a dead creature before now. The body was squashed into the trunk, but he was able to feel down the sides. You never knew if you'd find something worthwhile. His fingers touched some silky kind of fabric and he tugged at it until it came free. What the hell? It seemed to be some kind of hat, gold coloured, with a sprig of feathers in the front. There was a metal brooch in the front studded with what were obviously fake rubies. He unfastened it and put it in his pocket. The hat he returned to the chest. Now that he felt calmer he had a closer look at the corpse and he shook his head. Somebody had had a go at the lad good and proper. His hair was caked with blood and his nose was destroyed. He dropped the lid, frightened, and glanced around to see if someone were watching him. Then he picked up his sack and began the trek back the shore. He supposed he'd better notify the police. They might be glad of the information.

Ruby raked out the ashes from the stove and shovelled them into her cinder pail. She worked quickly, not because she was late, she wasn't, she never was, but because the kitchen was cold. A puff of fine white ash went up her nose and she sneezed. She returned some of the larger pieces of cinder to the bottom of the stove, laid strips of paper on top of them, then added kindling, not a lot, just enough to get the blaze going. She balanced chunks of coal on the wood. She already blackened and polished the stove and the coal and iron reflected to each other their hard shiny surfaces.

"You're too particular," Mrs. Buchanan had chided her, but Ruby knew she was pleased.

She took a match out of the box, struck it, and lit the paper. The flame jumped up immediately and licked at the dry wood and Ruby sat back on her heels and watched for a moment. Miss Georgina had shown her how to draw flames. *Think of a holly leaf with its sharp points. That's the shape. That and pine tree branches.* She'd got Ruby practising on

pieces of scrap paper and she was right. Add some logs, easier to draw than pieces of coal, and you had a believable depiction of fire. *She's a talented girl*, said Mrs. Crofton, and Miss Georgina had ruffled her hair and said, *What would we do without her?* Ruby had flushed with pride. Sometimes in her secret heart, she pretended she was actually Miss Georgina's child who had been snatched away at birth by the gypsies and that someday the truth would be revealed and she would claim her real family and they her.

She waited until she was sure the fire had caught, then closed the door.

Her next task was to drain the large teapot on the draining board by the sink and she got the strainer and poured the cold tea into a cup. Mrs. Buchanan believed the tea had medicinal qualities and used it to bathe her eyes.

Never squint, child. I used to have the eyesight of a fox but I squinted in poor light and now I'm as good as blind.

Not quite. The housekeeper's keenness of sight was variable, or so it seemed to Ruby. She could detect a hurriedly dusted sideboard from across the room.

A clean house and a clean soul are side by side in God's heart, she'd declare. Mrs. Buchanan was full of sayings and proverbs and offered them daily. Ruby never felt impatient with these repetitions. The words rounded and softened in her mind, pleasant as pebbles worn smooth by the waves rolling in on the lakeshore. She stored them like provisions.

Laying the table in the breakfast room was the next task, but she had plenty of time. Neither of the mistresses rose early in the winter, and Mrs. Buchanan took advantage of this and stayed in her warm bed until eight o'clock.

Old bones feel the cold much more than young ones, she'd declared.

Ruby picked up the heavy housemaid's box. After her other tasks were done, she would come back to light the kitchen lamps and make the room bright and cheerful for the housekeeper. No sense in doing that now.

At the end of the sink, Ruby had tucked a dish of water out of sight under the window ledge. Whenever she was alone either coming into the kitchen or leaving, she dipped the tips of her fingers into the water and touched her forehead and chest. A girl at school had told her that Papists did that when they went to church and they asked for God's blessing. You were supposed to have magic water, but Ruby had collected rain water from the barrel in the garden, thinking that it would be almost as good. Now she said her own prayer.

"To Lord Jesus and particularly to your mother, Mary. Please keep me safe and in this house forever until I am an old lady. Please keep Mrs. Buchanan in good health and also Mrs. Crofton. Please help her with her bunions."

She dipped her fingers again in the water and wiped her forehead. She needed as much power as she could get.

"Please, Jesus, will you especially take care of Miss Georgina. She is so good and she doesn't mean any harm, she truly doesn't. Please ask your mother to protect her and keep her secret safe."

Even admitting Miss Georgina had a secret was frightening to Ruby, but she thought that in the silence of the sleeping household she could say it to Jesus at least. She needed to unburden herself somewhere.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The chill winter morning air had hit Murdoch's lungs as soon as he stepped outside and he savoured it. He put thoughts of Enid out of his mind. He was struck by what Arthur had said and he felt an awareness of his own health he hadn't had before. He hurried, driven by the cold, aware that he could move fast if he had to, that his legs responded. He was a little breathless by the time he reached the station, but he knew that would soon pass. His body worked.

He entered the warm, snug hall of the station. Sergeant Gardiner was on duty and Constable Callahan was already at the telegraph and telephone desk.

"Early, aren't you?" Murdoch said as he walked by on his way to his cubicle.

"I'm just trying to keep ahead, sir. Do you want I should bring you a cup of tea? I am not yet officially on duty and you know what it's like trying to get a cuppa when the duty shift changes."

"Indeed I do. They should start coming in any minute now. So yes, in answer to your question. I like it hot, strong, and sweet if you please."

“Sounds like you’re talking about an amour, Murdoch,” chipped in Gardiner. “Are you holding back on anything?”

Murdoch liked the sergeant and usually didn’t object to getting into randy banter with him. This morning, however, he was in no mood for jokes and innuendos about his love life.

“If I am, I’ll tell it to the rushes first, sergeant.”

Gardiner looked puzzled, but Murdoch didn’t give him an opportunity to say any more. He hung his hat and sealskin coat on the peg by the door and went through to his office. The constables who were on the morning shift would soon be arriving for their inspection. Hales, the patrol sergeant, would make sure they were “all present and correct,” then he would march them out to the different beats to replace the bone-chilled, hungry constables on the night shift, who had probably been counting the minutes for the past three-quarters of an hour.

Once in his private space, Murdoch felt a little better. He took some notepaper from his desk drawer, dropping a kiss with his fingertips on the photograph of Liza as he did so. He found writing out his thoughts and impressions helped him when he was on a case. These were for his use, and were not the official notes he handed in to Inspector Brackenreid. Where to start? No avoiding now; no letting softer feelings interfere with rationality.

Amy Slade . He had been taken aback when the schoolteacher had entered the boarding house, but she had made no secret of her address. Her explanation that her fellow boarder, Seymour, had recommended him was reasonable. But what if there were more to it than that? Murdoch could not imagine Miss Slade being a liar, but he forced himself to examine the possibility. Possessing and taking pornographic photographs certainly constituted an illegal activity. What if Seymour was implicated and she wanted some way to draw attention to this without revealing her identity? If she had a typewriting machine, she

could have written the letters, which definitely showed evidence of education. By her own admission, she hadn't told Seymour the precise nature of her visit to Murdoch. Was she somehow in Seymour's thrall or afraid of him and thought the only way out was in this covert manner?

He wrote a large *no* beside that note and underlined it. Nothing he had observed about Miss Slade fitted that notion. She was one of the more independent-minded women he had met in a while. And poor Seymour! Here he was, entertaining the idea that Charlie indulged in a perverted sexual appetite. Murdoch sighed. He wasn't on as sure ground here. Men were capable of splitting off their sexual fantasies and activities and keeping them in some dark secret place while on the surface they lived exemplary lives.

He removed Liza's photograph from the drawer and stared at the blurry face. She'd held strong opinions about the question of sexual activity and the law. *If two grown-up people in their right minds want to do weird and unnatural acts with each other, let them. But if coercion is involved or any misuse of children or animals, I think they should be prosecuted and the punishment should be severe.*

He remembered being shocked when she'd said that, wondering how on earth she even knew of such things as "weird and unnatural acts." He'd finally asked her and she said she'd read about it. He smiled ruefully. If women had been allowed, she would have studied law. What an odd mixture of conventional and radical thinking she'd held. She had insisted they wait until marriage before consummating their love according to their church's dictum. He'd agreed but how he regretted that now.

He returned the photograph to the drawer. Thinking about Liza seemed to affect the way he felt about Enid and he found it hard to shake off vague feelings of discontent. What a shock it had been to see *Enid Murdoch*.

Then there was Miss Amy Slade. He halted. What the hell did he mean, *And then there was Miss Amy Slade*? He hardly knew her. Besides, he wasn't the kind of man who could dally with one woman while promising himself to another. Was he promised to Enid? He didn't feel like answering that question. He glanced up at the portrait of a young and pretty Queen. Even the Queen of India and the Empire was not spared grief. She had been a widow for a long time now and showed no signs of coming out of mourning.

Impatiently, he pulled the notepaper closer. He hadn't got very far with the notes he was supposed to be making.

The talk with Arthur had deeply affected him, as had finding out that the Kitchens were leaving. Nobody had said as much, but it was highly unlikely that Arthur would come back. Murdoch rested his head in his hands. What would it be like if Arthur were to recover? If he and Murdoch did race each along the edges of the lake? Like all impossible dreams, this one brought a sense of almost unbearable longing.

There was a tap on the wall. Through the reed strips, Murdoch could see Constable Crabtree.

"Come in, George."

Crabtree poked his head in. "The inspector wants to see you right away."

Murdoch didn't move. "Did he say why?"

"No, except to come at once."

Murdoch stood up. "At once, it is."

Crabtree hesitated. "Are you all right, sir? You look a bit peaked."

"I'm well enough, thank you. But I feel as if I have been listening to the hooves of *equis nocti* drawing closer. The sound can make a man grow pale."

"Yes, sir. He does seem in rather a foul mood, I'm afraid."

Murdoch smiled at the constable's misinterpretation.

“Fair or foul, give me Inspector Brackenreid any day. He is mortal after all.”

Slightly cheered by his own humour, Murdoch followed Crabtree out into the corridor.

Brackenreid handed him a piece of paper.

“Take a look at this, Murdoch. Different twist.” He made no attempt to hide his sneer.

Murdoch unfolded the letter.

Dear Sir. Your acting detective, William Murdoch, is not doing his job. He is not ‘acting’ at all but sitting on his buttock while Sergeant Seymour continues unpunished. If this matter is not dealt with the entire station will be shamed.

“So what do you say, Murdoch?”

“I wonder if the writer was referring to the left or the right?”

“What?”

“The left or the right buttock, sir. That I am allegedly sitting on.”

Brackenreid flapped his hand. “That’s got nothing to do with it.”

“I presume the letter came with the first post, sir?”

“Yes. The early worm gets the bird.”

Murdoch glanced up at him, not sure if he was trying to be witty. Clearly not.

“Quite so, sir. I’ll take this and compare it with the others, make sure they are by the same writer.”

The inspector stared at Murdoch. “Of course they are the same. This one is typewritten.”

“I just don’t want to make any assumptions. I’m wondering how the writer knew that I had been assigned to the case.”

Reluctantly, Brackenreid conceded the point. "It doesn't necessarily mean anything. You are the only detective here. It is only logical you'd be given the case."

Murdoch wasn't entirely satisfied with that explanation but he nodded.

"Acorns from mighty oaks do drop, as you might say."

Brackenreid sniffed. His face was normally florid, but this morning it seemed to have taken on a purplish tinge. He had all the signs of a man suffering the aftermath of overindulgence.

He drummed his fingers on his desktop. "I am inclined to agree with the letter writer on one thing, Murdoch. You aren't doing enough."

"May I point out I have only been on the case since Tuesday, sir. Less haste more waste."

That jest sailed right over Brackenreid's head. "Maybe so, but it's not the only place where you're dragging your feet. I haven't seen any progress on the Smithers situation."

"We've questioned everybody, sir. We have no leads."

Brackenreid waved his hand impatiently. "I'm sure the woman lost the damn brooch herself, but she called three times yesterday and insisted on talking to me. The telephone is a menace in the hands of women like that. You'll have to go over or send one of the constables and see if you can appease her. Arrest somebody."

Murdoch couldn't believe he was serious but in this mood he was. Definitely not the time to tell him about the photographs.

"I'll do what I can, sir."

Brackenreid leaned forward on his desk. "Let's put it this way, Murdoch. If you do find out the po-faced sergeant has been up to no good, he will have to pay back every penny he's getting now for sitting on his arse at home."

Murdoch got to his feet. "If that's everything, I'll get going, sir."

The inspector swivelled around in his chair so that he was facing the window, his back to Murdoch.

"I want a full report by Monday. On both cases."

Back in his cubicle, Murdoch took the two other letters out of the file and spread them on the desk, studying each one with the magnifying glass. As far as he could see the latest one had been typewritten on the same machine as the others. The tone was certainly similar. Educated, school-marmish almost. "Buttock," not "arse" or "rear end" or "duff." And his full name. This letter was aimed much more at him than Seymour. He drew in his breath angrily. Who the hell was playing around like this? And where should he start searching? He supposed the only lead he had, if you could call it that, was the faintest suggestion that Seymour was indeed up to something. Whatever it was, the anonymous letter writer knew enough about the sergeant's life to accuse him. It made sense then, that by following in the sergeant's footsteps, or one of his friends at the lodging house, he might find the writer. And what if the sergeant was doing something against the law? What then? Presumably Murdoch would be forced to charge him. He didn't relish that task. What sort of impact would that have on Miss Slade, who considered Seymour one of the most honourable men she had ever met?

There was a tap on the outside wall and he could see Crabtree's shape through the strips.

"Yes, George?"

The constable stepped into the room. "There's a telephone message just come in for you, sir. From Dr. Bryce. He's over at the morgue and he'd like you come over right away."

Murdoch frowned. "Did he say why, or am I just to admire his finesse?"

Dr. Bryce enjoyed being called as a medical examiner and had no compunction about boasting about his skill.

“Apparently somebody found a body in a trunk on the lake and there’s no doubt it’s a homicide.”

“In that case, I will indeed go right away.”

CHAPTER TWENTY

Dr. Bryce was a tall man, with a bald head and a heavy moustache. He had an air of confidence that was perilously close to arrogance, but Murdoch rather liked him. In spite of his brusque manners, he cared about what he was doing and the fact that the bodies he was dissecting had once been living human beings. Not all physicians behaved in that way.

As soon as Murdoch entered the room, the doctor called out to him. "We've got a nasty business on our hands, detective. Come and have a look."

Murdoch walked over to the table where Bryce was standing, a blood-stained apron covering his elegant grey worsted suit. There was a small steamer trunk on the table with the lid open.

"I don't know how much I can do right now," the doctor continued. "The body is still frozen. It's stiff as a board. We can't even get it out."

Murdoch peered into the trunk. Inside was the body of a young man, stark naked, his knees bent up to the chest and his arms folded across each other. His head was pushed sideways. For a brief moment, Murdoch was puzzled why the youth looked familiar, but then with a jolt, he realized it

was the same boy who had been in the stereographic photograph. He wasn't wearing the turban, but there was no mistaking him.

"Is he one of yours?" Bryce asked.

Explanations weren't necessary at this point, so Murdoch was evasive. "I haven't met him before. I'll have to take Bertillon measurements to see if he's in our criminal system."

"Well, you'll find him there, I'll wager. The man was a catamite."

"Is that so?"

"Here, touch his chest."

Murdoch lightly touched the icy skin. The chest wasn't as smooth as it appeared.

"He's shaved off the hair," continued Bryce in his lecturing tones. "On the chest and it looks like also at the pubis. Of course, I'll swear to it when I do a rectal probe, but there's not much doubt."

Murdoch wasn't surprised. The painted face and lascivious pose of the photograph had suggested as much.

"How did he die?"

"I can't tell you that, detective! You'll have to wait for my report. I have to do a proper postmortem examination. He could have had a heart attack, he could have consumption, syphilis, who knows?"

Murdoch pointed at the corpse. "He's been badly beaten and I'd say there are marks around his neck."

Bryce nodded approvingly as if he were an observant pupil. "I'd say the poor wretch has been strangled. But there are other traumas. See there. His left shin is quite shattered and there are at least two ribs on the same side that are depressed. You can see the bruises. More than likely he was kicked. He may have a skull fracture, but I won't know that until I remove the scalp."

"Is there any possibility the injuries were caused when he was stuffed into the trunk?"

“No, no. Look at his leg. There has been a flow of blood down to the ankle that could only occur if he was alive when he was hurt. My guess is that he was beaten, then strangled, and then his body bent so it would fit into the trunk, which may have caused further damage. I can verify that later.”

“Do you have any idea when he died, doctor?”

“None at all. All deterioration has been halted because of the cold. I see no staining on the body, so that tells me he was put into the trunk almost immediately after death. He could have been killed as long ago as two weeks when we experienced that severe cold weather or as recently as a few days past.”

Bryce attempted to move one of the boy’s arms but it was still intractable.

“How old do you think he is?”

“His genitalia appears to be fully developed. I’d place him at about twenty years of age.” Bryce lifted the corpse’s upper lip as far as he could. “His teeth seem decayed. He’s thin, probably not well-nourished. I suppose one should feel sorry for him.” He looked up at Murdoch, who made no comment. “Well, that’s it then.” Bryce removed his apron, crumpled it up, and dropped it on the floor. “I can’t do anything more for now and I have to attend one of my patients who is at the point of delivering a baby. The bookends of life, eh, Murdoch? Mr. Boys is acting as coroner and he’s called an inquest for Monday morning. I should have my report for both of you no later than Saturday.”

“Thank you, doctor.”

As soon as Bryce had left, Murdoch took his measuring tape from his pocket and did the best he could to at least get the approximate height of the dead man. He was about five feet tall. His hair was dark and cut short, but there were signs around his nails, neck, and the back of his ears that he hadn’t had much opportunity to keep himself clean. Or didn’t care to.

The air was stinging with the chloride of lime the doctor used to keep down the smell. The room was bare, lined with shelves that were empty although some large jars were stacked in one corner. A weigh scale, the kind found in most kitchens, was on a backless chair by the table. This morgue could not be called well-equipped, and Murdoch knew most of the doctors who were called upon to do postmortem examinations preferred to use one of the funeral parlours such as Humphrey's on Yonge Street. He stayed another three-quarters of an hour, taking what measurements he could for the Bertillon files and examining the trunk as closely as he could. It was well used by the look of it, but there were no identifying traces of custom stamps or steamer stickers. No address to help him.

Finally, he straightened up, crossed himself, and muttered a quick prayer for God to have mercy on the boy's soul. Bryce had estimated his age as close to twenty but death had erased care from his face and he looked very young. What the hell was Agnes Fisher doing with his picture and why had she drawn a black border around the card? There was only one answer to that: She knew he was dead.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The Sackville Street School was closer to the morgue than Sydenham Street was so Murdoch decided to go there first just in case Agnes was now in attendance. The weather hovered between snow and sleet with an overcast sky and damp, chill air. Even at this midpoint of the morning, most of the houses showed lit lamps and candles. He couldn't shake off his own inner dreariness either. He'd investigated cases of murder in the past, and one or two of them had brought him to the edge of despair over the darkness human beings were capable of. This case felt equally ugly. He almost doubted that Agnes Fisher was still alive. She could well be implicated in the youth's death, which would have put her in grave danger. Unconsciously, he braced his shoulders. He'd been accused more than once of being as stubborn as a mule, and he felt mulish now. He intended to find whoever was exploiting Agnes Fisher, but he also knew by removing them he was cutting off only one of the many heads of the Hydra. This was not a happy thought.

There were no children in the playground, and he crossed it quickly and entered the school through the boys entrance. The corridor was likewise deserted, and this time as he approached Miss Slade's classroom, he heard no

animal imitations, just the children chanting their multiplication tables.

“Five times eight is forty; six times eight is forty-eight; seven times...”

He stood outside the door and peered through the window. Miss Slade was at the front of the classroom, waving a stick as if she were conducting an orchestra. Today she had abandoned the pantaloons and was wearing a conventional navy blue skirt and pale mauve waist. Her fair hair was as neatly pinned as usual. The radical New Woman had temporarily disappeared.

“Faster now, eight times eight is sixty-four; nine times eight is...” She caught sight of him but didn’t miss a beat. “Girls only.”

Shrill voices rang out. “Ten times eight is eighty.” “Now the boys.” “Eleven times eight is eighty-eight.”

These voices were much less confident.

“Twelve times eight is ninety-six.”

“Reverse,” Miss Slade called out and she pivoted to demonstrate. “Eight times twelve is...? Everybody together.”

“Ninety-six.”

That was easy but then she took them rapidly down through the numbers until only a few of the children, all of them the girls, could keep up with her. Murdoch thought they were still enjoying themselves and the excitement of competition.

Finally, she lowered her stick. “Excellent, children. That was a great improvement. Well done. I want you to give yourselves a big round of applause.”

She clapped her hands and the class joined in with enthusiasm.

“All right, all right. That’s sufficient. Save some for the next practise when we will be impeccable. Jane, what does ‘impeccable’ mean?”

“Clean, Miss Slade.”

“Hm. Yes, you are quite right. The literal meaning of the word is ‘without sin,’ but as with many words in the English language its meaning has adapted to refer to anything perfect, as in with no error, or as Jane rightfully says, ‘Clean.’” She clapped her hands again, a habit, he noticed. “Now, take out your slates if you please. I have written some sums on the blackboard. Let’s see how quickly you can do them. The first two children who get everything right get a sweetie.”

With a flourish worthy of a magician, she pulled back a shawl that she had draped over the blackboard, revealing neat chalk numbers ready to be worked. The class took a few moments to settle down and as soon as they were quiet, Miss Slade came out into the hall.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Murdoch. Sorry to keep you waiting.”

She offered her hand and they shook, firmly.

“Has Agnes come to school today?”

“No, she has not.” She frowned. “I am worried about her. Do you have any news?”

“Yes, and I’m afraid it is serious. The young man in the photograph has been found dead. There is little doubt he was murdered.”

Her hand flew to her mouth. “I see.”

“The doctor conducting the postmortem examination places the death between two weeks and two days ago.”

She eyed him gravely. “How was he killed?”

“He was strangled. And I’m afraid badly beaten.”

Almost on reflex, she glanced through the classroom window to see what her pupils were up to. They were quiet, working for the prize.

“We must find Agnes,” she said.

“Is her brother in school?”

“Yes, he is. He has a dreadful bruise over his eye. I believe his father hit him, but he says he banged into the dresser in the dark.”

She pulled out a watch from a pocket in the bodice of her silk waist. The watch was unadorned steel and attached to a chain, masculine style. An ebony charm dangled from the fob end of the chain and he wondered what it signified.

"We will be having playtime in only ten minutes. If you will wait until then, I will dismiss the class. I would prefer to keep things as normal as possible for now. I'll ask Ben to stay behind. You can speak to him in the classroom."

"Do you wish to be present?"

She smiled at him ruefully. "Mr. Murdoch, if I am present, there is some chance he will confide in you. If I am not, you might as well put him on the rack, he will not utter a word."

"Very well. Why don't I go back outside so the children don't see me. As soon as I know they are set free, I'll return."

"Thank you, Mr. Murdoch, that is most thoughtful of you."

She went back into the classroom, which was still quiet. Miss Slade might involve her pupils in games but she commanded their respect. He thought they were lucky children. His memories of school were definitely not as agreeable as he supposed those her students would have. The priests and nuns who had taught him firmly believed that the mind was stimulated by corporal punishment. From buttocks to brain. As for learning being fun, that hadn't occurred to them either.

He went outside and walked up and down until the ten minutes was up and both doors burst open and the children surged out. At least, the boys surged, the girls were much more demure. With arms linked, in twos or threes, they proceeded to walk around the perimeters of the schoolyard while the boys immediately began to play tag around the trees. As unobtrusively as he could, Murdoch made his way back to the classroom.

Ben was sitting in one of the desks near the front and Miss Slade was beside him talking. The boy's head was

lowered and he was staring at the top of his desk as if there was some excruciating puzzle scratched there. Murdoch gave a tap on the door, then went in. Ben gave one quick, frightened glance at him then resumed his downward, fixed stare. Miss Slade touched the boy lightly on the arm.

“Ben, we are very concerned about Agnes. She has not been in school for the past two days. You say she is with your sister, but we must find her. Will you help Mr. Murdoch?”

There was no response from the child except a slight shrinking down into his seat. He had a nasty bruise and lump above his eye. Miss Slade indicated to Murdoch to take the closest desk and he squeezed himself into the seat.

“Ben, do you know why Aggie isn’t in school?”

The boy shook his head, not looking up.

“And she hasn’t been at home?”

Another shake.

“She’s with your sister, but you still don’t know where that is?”

“No, I don’t,” Ben whispered.

Murdoch hesitated. “You know, son, when I was a lad, my pa used to haul off and give me a stoter when he’d been drinking, just like the one you’ve got over your eye. When I grew up, I decided to become a police officer because I thought I’d like to do what I could to protect people who couldn’t defend themselves against such men, like women and children and the crippled-”

The boy looked at him in alarm. “You’re not going to arrest Pa are you?”

Murdoch couldn’t promise that and he glanced over at Amy Slade, not wanting to dump everything into her lap but thinking she might know what to say. She did.

“Ben, do you remember that story we all read about the fox and the chickens? Well, remember how we all discussed that we can’t be angry at the fox because that is his nature to catch and eat chickens?”

The boy looked rather bewildered but he nodded.

Amy searched around for words, for once at a loss. "Do you remember that we said that as human beings we are considered to be superior to the animals. We have brains and souls...Unfortunately, Ben, there are some men who have never risen above their animal nature. They become like the foxes and young girls are like the chickens."

"They eat them, you mean?" Ben asked, his eyes wide with horror.

"Oh my Lord. No, not that but..."

"They do them harm," finished Murdoch. Something flickered across the boy's face and he thought that Ben knew what he was talking about. "The point is we need to find your sister as soon as possible, but we absolutely cannot do it without your help."

"You're like the boy who saves the flock," interjected Miss Slade.

Ben's face lit up. The idea of being a hero obviously appealed to him. He met Murdoch's eyes. "Did you put your pa in jail when you got to be a frog?"

"No...but I sure felt like doing that."

Ben ducked his head again. "You know that picture you showed me? Of the dead baby? Well, I've seen it before. Aggie had it."

"Did she say where she got it from?" Murdoch asked, keeping his voice as neutral as he could.

"No, but she had a bunch of photographs. I think Martha gave them to her."

"Were they all like that one? Were they mourning photographs?"

"Some were. They were scary...She teased me with them, waving them in my face."

"Did she show you any of the others?"

"No. She said they were private and I was too much of a baby to see them."

This had obviously been an ongoing conflict between Aggie and Ben, older sister and young brother.

A bell began to clang from the playground. "The children will be coming back shortly," said Miss Slade.

Murdoch groaned inwardly. "Ben, you said you didn't know where Martha was working, but is there anything at all you can tell us. Did she come home on the streetcar, for instance, or is she close enough to walk?"

"She always walked 'cos she saved money."

"How long has she been in service? When did she find the newspaper?"

Ben thought for a moment. "It was in the summer when it was hot. Just after we got out of school."

Amy interjected. "That would be the end of June."

There was a clatter outside in the hall as the children came down the hall. At the sound, any openness in the boy disappeared and it was as if he had fled to his mental burrow. Murdoch cursed. He looked at the schoolteacher and she gave a little shrug. She knew it was hopeless to continue at this point.

Murdoch stood up. He touched the boy's shorn head. He wanted to say, If your father hits you again, let me know, but he knew the boy wouldn't dare. "Ben, don't forget what I said. Let us know if Aggie comes home."

Ben nodded slightly and Murdoch thought he would at least do that much. Miss Slade told him he could go now and he slunk back to his own desk. She accompanied Murdoch into the hall.

"Please let me know as soon as you have any news, Mr. Murdoch."

"Of course."

She returned to the classroom and Murdoch saw her go to the boy's desk and crouch beside him. He turned to leave.

The children were walking down the hall in an orderly line, all the chatter left outside. Their silence was enforced

by the figure of a tall, severe-looking man with a red face and bristling whiskers. Murdoch assumed he was the headmaster, Mr. Kippen. He touched his hat politely as he walked past, knowing that it was on the tip of the man's tongue to ask him what he was doing there. He was only prevented from doing so by the behaviour of one of the boys who seemed to be chewing something. That got him a clout on the side of the head. The lad yelped in protest and the headmaster raised his hand to strike him again. Murdoch stepped forward.

"Mr. Kippen, sir. I am a police officer and I'd say I am a good judge of the criminal character. That boy you have there is as fine a looking boy as I've seen. I doubt you need to worry about him. And I don't hold with beating of boys or horses, myself."

Kippen turned even more red but he released the lad, who scurried away to join his intimidated pals. Murdoch moved even closer to the headmaster and lowered his voice to a conspiratorial whisper.

"In case you're wondering why I'm here, I must tell you, I'm investigating a very serious case of brutality. I suggest you be careful, if you take my meaning. The chief constable is renowned for his soft heart."

That was a complete misrepresentation but Murdoch didn't care. It was either that lie or a punch to the head of the headmaster and he didn't think the latter was wise. With another flick of his hat he walked out. After a couple of blocks, he'd calmed down a little but was still tempted to go back into the school and give Mr. Kippen the thrashing he deserved.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Murdoch hurried back to the station. It was time to inform Brackenreid what was going on and he wasn't looking forward to it. The inspector had the finesse of the old barber surgeons. *Oh, got an ingrown toenail, have you? We'd better amputate that foot then.* Murdoch had a growing and deep conviction that this case required all the delicacy it could get. One slight misstep and Agnes Fisher might be a goner, if she wasn't already. To his great relief, however, Gardiner told him that Inspector Brackenreid was at home with a stomach upset. Murdoch beckoned to Constable Crabtree and headed for his cubicle.

He told him the whole story, beginning with Miss Slade's discovery of the photographs and the disturbing tie to the body found on the lake. Crabtree's broad face flushed slightly when Murdoch showed him the photographs, but then he looked angry. He had children of his own.

"George, I'd like you to go to visit Agnes's father. Maybe the sight of a uniform will jolt his memory about his older girl's whereabouts. Do whatever you need to do, frighten him to within an inch of his life if you have to."

"Be happy to, sir."

"There's a young woman living downstairs. See if she can give you anything to go on. Ask the neighbours if they have any idea where Martha Fisher is in service. If you get the slightest lead, take it."

"Yes, sir."

"If that's a dead end, I want you to start walking up and down the nobby streets. Start with Jarvis. See if anybody has recently taken on a new servant."

"Can we get some more help, sir?"

Murdoch sighed. "Let's see how this goes first. The girl might have taken a place not too far from home. You might find her quickly."

"And if the younger girl is with her?"

"See if she will come down to the station willingly, but if not, you'll have to make her. She's in danger." Murdoch stood up. "I'm afraid I don't have many leads, just a bad feeling in my stomach that I'm going to acknowledge. I'm going to visit Gregory's Emporium and see if I can shake anything loose there. Let's meet back here in a couple of hours."

"Yes, sir."

At the entrance to the cubicle, Crabtree hesitated, then turned to Murdoch.

"I have a daughter, as you know, sir. I find it incomprehensible what has been done to Agnes Fisher. I don't care if my feet fall off, I'm going to find her."

"Thank you, George."

A slightly tousled Mrs. Gregory opened the door of the studio. She brought a recalcitrant strand of hair under control.

"We're not open for business today."

Murdoch beamed at her. "I do apologize, ma'am, but I'm about to head back home and I'd like to get my photographs. Save you having to post them to me."

She hesitated, then stepped back and let him come in. "I think they're ready. Just a moment."

While she was checking in the desk drawer, Murdoch wandered closer, composing his face into what he hoped was a suitable leer. "Mrs. Gregory, I can tell just by looking at you that you're a liberal-minded woman...I've heard a man can get, you know, er, special cards...Naughty ones, if you know what I mean."

Her expression turned so icy, he quailed. He had no real proof the studio wasn't utterly respectable and now he had possibly insulted a decent woman.

"I have no idea to what you are referring, Mr. Murdoch." She thrust the package into his hand. "Here are your photographs. The balance on account is two dollars and twenty-five cents."

He handed over the money and she snatched it from his hand as if it were contagious.

"We will keep the negative plates for one month and if you want more prints you must let us know at once. Good day, sir." She picked up a pen from the tray and jabbed it into the inkwell so sharply, he almost winced.

There was nothing for it but to leave. When he was in the hall, he heard the door lock behind him.

The light on the stairs was too feeble for him to get a good look at the photographs so he waited until he was outside where the thin winter sun had reappeared and the sky was the pale blue of old, faded eyes.

He studied the photograph, looking for any detail at all that was the same as in the picture of Agnes Fisher. There was nothing. The backdrop was just as Gregory had set it up for him. Perhaps an expert could tell the difference from one camera to another the way Enid could distinguish typewriting machines but he couldn't.

Then he looked at the whole image, himself in the Prince's study. He grinned wryly. He looked quite distinguished, if he said so himself. Add a desk and

bookcase, make your subject stare sombrely into the camera, and you've got a man in the professions with an illustrious career ahead of him. For a moment, Murdoch felt a pang of disappointment. Such a possibility was closed to him. Roman Catholic men with no family connections and no education beyond standard six would never enter any of the professions. Even being accepted into the detective division had been a chance thing. At the last minute one of the applicants had fallen ill and Inspector Stark needed a man to fill his quota. Murdoch was it, although he had been relegated to acting detective for three years now and he didn't know if that status would ever change.

He returned the photographs to the envelope, feeling frustrated again with his lack of progress with the case. Was Mrs. Gregory and the studio what they seemed to be? He couldn't tell and unless he got a search warrant, he wasn't any closer to finding the telltale props. He thought of going in search of Crabtree but another thought niggled at the back of his mind. The coincidence of the anonymous letters bothered him. Paradoxically, the discovery of the murdered boy had been a relief. Reluctantly, he'd let himself entertain the possibility that his friend, Seymour, might have perverse sexual appetites, but he'd bet his life that the sergeant wouldn't have been party to the vicious beating and strangulation of a young man. He decided this was when discretion could be put aside. Seymour had to come clean.

Murdoch headed along King toward River Street, his thoughts suddenly jumping away to his own situation. The Kitchens and Enid were all on the verge of leaving him. Rationally, he knew that they didn't have much choice. Moving to Muskoka might save Arthur's life and he understood why Enid couldn't ignore the summons to go home. But damn it, all three of them at the same time! He'd even had a fleeting thought after Mrs. K.'s announcement that Enid could move back into the house when they left. He knew she wouldn't, though. Not without a landlady to

chaperone them. He'd never quite given up being surprised that she had consented to having connections with him. Not just consented, actually seemed to welcome it. That thought stirred him up, but was followed as quickly by shame.

I saw your face, Will. She saw that he didn't want to marry her. And that was why she was going back to Wales.

By the time he reached Seymour's boarding house, he was thoroughly chilled. The sky might be blue but the price was wind with an Arctic bite to it. He'd walked straight past the planing mill, no dancing on logs today.

Reordan let him in. The livid burn marks on his face seemed even more disfiguring in the winter sunlight. He wasn't very welcoming either.

"Charlie has stepped out. If that's who you're calling on."

"Yes, it is. Do you know when he'll be back?"

"Half an hour at the most."

"Can I wait for him then? I don't want to walk all the way back to the station if he'll be here soon."

Reluctantly, Reordan stepped back so Murdoch could enter.

"I won't disturb you. Shall I wait in the kitchen?"

"That's private quarters."

"Seymour's room, then? I can't just stand here."

"Top of the stairs on the right," Reordan conceded reluctantly.

He shuffled off, leaving a strange, malodorous miasma behind him. Reordan was not a man for washing.

Murdoch went up the stairs. Like the hallway, the walls were bare and painted the same white. The only concession to comfort was a grey sisal runner. Last year, Murdoch had visited his dying sister in the convent where she was a cloistered nun. There had been the same air of austerity and scrupulous cleanliness about the convent halls. He almost

expected to see a crucifix here. There wasn't one, but at the end of the landing there was a small table over which hung a large framed photograph.

He went to have a look at it. The table was of polished walnut and on it was a silver candleholder and a little silver dish filled with dried rose petals. He examined the photograph, a formal studio portrait of a balding man, probably in late middle age. He had a strong nose and a white, neatly trimmed beard that couldn't hide the powerful thrust of his chin. The compelling thing about him were his eyes, which were heavy lidded and dark and bespoke both compassion and intelligence. It was an attractive face. There was no name attached to the photograph and Murdoch couldn't identify him. He was about to turn away when he spotted a stamped imprint at the bottom right side of the picture. It was a circle around a triangle with the letters S.O.M.A. written between the circle and the triangle. Murdoch was familiar with most Masonic Order symbols and this wasn't one of them, but he guessed it was some kind of esoteric order. The little dish of flowers, faintly perfumed, and the candle could be some kind of offering or just decoration, he couldn't tell. The unknown man didn't look like the kind who solicited adoration, but who knew for sure. He took out his notebook, copied the symbol, and turned to Seymour's room. The door was slightly open, a low fire in the grate and a lamp lit. Clearly the sergeant hadn't intended to be gone for long. Murdoch went in. He was uncomfortable with anything that might imply spying, but he also knew he wouldn't get another chance like this.

Like the rest of the house, Seymour's room was neat and underfurnished. A narrow bed, covered with a grey blanket, was against one wall. Two cane chairs were arranged in front of the fire, one with a footstool. There was a wardrobe, oaken and plain, a washstand and a small desk. The only decoration, if you could call them that, were two high bookcases on either side of the hearth. They were

loaded with books and binders of newspapers. Murdoch walked over to get a look at the sergeant's taste in reading material but was stopped midway by what he saw on the desk. A stereoscope was lying beside a pile of view cards. For an instant, Murdoch froze, not wanting to go any farther. However, he had no choice. He picked up one of the cards.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

The card read, *Making ladies waists* , and showed neatly dressed women sitting across from each other at long tables. Murdoch turned the card over. It was from the T. Eaton Company and explained in glowing terms that the floor engaged more than four hundred and fifty operators and the factory was light, clean, and airy and, even better, the company boasted that they kept a superior class of help. Murdoch put the card into the stereoscope and adjusted the slide until the photograph sprang into relief. The factory certainly looked industrious, with row upon row of women, heads bent over their sewing machines, all definitely looking like a superior kind of woman. He imagined their hands and nails would be inspected by a supervisor every day. Not unlike the constables when they reported for duty, come to think of it. Uniforms checked for spots, shoes for polish, and, of course, breath for any trace of alcohol. He was glad he didn't have to go through that any more.

The next few cards were also from the T. Eaton Company, *The laundry room*, *The mail room* , the same uninspired photographs of anonymous women and the reverse messages all praising the quality of their work.

Murdoch scanned the other cards, about two dozen of them: different employers but all of people working at a trade.

He replaced the stereoscope on the desk. If Seymour was interested in illicit pornographic views he wasn't likely to leave them out for all to see. He hesitated for a moment, then pulled open the drawer. More cards fastened with rubber bands. And an unfinished typewritten letter. He didn't have time to read it, but he noted the same cryptic symbol he'd seen on the portrait in the hall. A triangle inside a circle. There was the sound of the front door opening and almost at once Reordan's voice.

"Your police friend is upstairs, Charlie."

Murdoch went over to the cane chair and sat down. He was highly uncomfortable at what he had just done, even though he believed it was necessary.

He heard Seymour's footsteps on the stairs and in a minute the man came into the room. Murdoch scrutinized his face and was relieved to see no trace of nervousness but rather the opposite. Seymour came over to him, hand outstretched.

"Good day to you, Will. Any news?"

"Not about the letters."

"What then?" The sergeant's expression was enigmatic but Murdoch thought he looked relieved.

Murdoch took the photograph of the turbaned youth from his envelope. "Do you know this fellow?"

Seymour stared at the picture for a moment but after an initial moment of shock, his face was once again inscrutable. "Is he dead?"

"Yes."

Seymour went over to the fire and poked at the coals. "What happened?"

"His body was found on the lake, stuffed into a steamer trunk. Somebody had beaten him then strangled him."

Murdoch saw the tension in Seymour's shoulders. "Poor sod."

“Do you know him?”

There was an indistinguishable mutter.

Suddenly Murdoch felt a surge of anger and he strode over to the fireplace. “Charlie, what the hell is going on here? What are you doing?”

Seymour didn’t answer but continued to stab the fire. Murdoch grabbed the handle of the poker, forcing him to stop. “Will you answer me, for God’s sake? You’ve got to stop hiding.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Seymour let go of the poker and stood up, moving away. Murdoch was after him.

“You bloody *do* know what I’m talking about. You’re doing something that some fart catcher knows about or suspects. Immoral, illegal, at the moment I don’t give a frig about fine lines. All those coy little glances and precious allusions. It’s obvious you’re all involved in some kind of secret society, the special handshakes, the shrine out there in the hall...”

Seymour’s lips were tight. “It’s not a shrine.”

“What the frig is it then? You obviously knew this boy. What was he, your nancy boy? Are you a group of panders who’ve convinced yourselves it’s all right?”

“Will, stop it! You can’t talk to me like this!”

Murdoch slapped the photograph. “He’s dead, Charlie, and he had a miserable death. I saw the look on your face. You knew him, admit it.”

The sergeant flushed. “That has nothing to do with the letters.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“Because I haven’t seen that lad for several years.”

Seymour dropped down on the edge of the bed and with a groan put his head in his hands. Murdoch waited impatiently for him to continue. Finally, he looked up. “His name is Leonard Sims and he was one of my nabs when I was on the beat. We raided a brothel where he was working. He was

only fourteen or fifteen at the time.” He stopped and, for a moment, Murdoch thought he was weeping. “I felt sorry for him and I let him go...Of course he was a guttersnipe to the core. He wasn’t grateful. But he saw this as his chance to try a spot of blackmail. He said he’d tell the inspector I’d sodomized him unless I gave him money.”

“And did you? Give him money?”

“No. I beat him and dragged him to the magistrate. He was sent to the industrial school for two years. I never heard from him after that.”

“Did he make good his threat?”

“Oh yes, but nobody believed him after what I’d done.” He shook his head. “I should have admitted at once that I knew who he was but it’s an episode I’m not proud of.”

“And you’re certain that the anonymous letter writer isn’t raking up old dirt?”

“I don’t think so. The letters refer to my present activities, if you recall.”

“Which are?”

“Will, I can’t tell you. The story isn’t mine alone to tell. I’m sorry.”

“Surely, these people wouldn’t want you to be dismissed to save their hides?”

“Whether they would or no isn’t the point. I told you, I have done nothing that sits on my conscience. You’ll have to believe me, Will. And I’m not going to say any more.”

“For God’s sake, Charlie. What are you, a dried-up old maid of a missionary who wants to kiss martyrdom? I’m not here to burn you at the stake. There are more important things happening than your delicate *conscience*.”

Seymour raised his voice in turn. “You know nothing about it. I don’t have a delicate conscience, as you call it. I’m not going to reveal secrets that aren’t mine alone.”

Murdoch reached in his pocket and took out the envelope with the photographs. He threw it on the desk. “Have a look at these. Miss Slade told you there was a legal

matter concerning one of her pupils but she too is of a delicate sensibility and she didn't show you the filth itself. The girl in the picture is the one who drew a mourning band around Leonard Sims's picture so she knows he's dead. As far as I know she could be dead too. Go on, take a look and then tell me if you want to help me find out who did it. That is as long as it doesn't interfere with your conscience too much."

At that moment, there was a tap on the door and Reordan limped in without waiting for an answer.

"What's all the shouting about?"

"Oh nothing much," said Murdoch, who was still steaming. "Charlie and me are having what you might call a philosophical discussion."

For some reason, his words seemed to fling Reordan into a rage and he bellowed, "Are you, indeed? Well that's no call to sneer at him, mister arse crawler of a policeman." He shuffled over to Murdoch with surprising speed and caught hold of the lapels of his coat. "I won't tolerate a copper trying to shout down a pal of mine."

The suddenness of the attack made Murdoch react instinctively and he in turn grabbed the Irishman by the wrists. He was a good foot shorter than Murdoch, which meant he was glaring up into his face like a terrier confronted by a mastiff.

"Don't worry about me being a cripple, Mr. Frog. I'll take you and your kind any day."

In fact, Murdoch could feel the strength in the man's arms. His destroyed face was crimson with rage and there was a speck of saliva at the corner of his mouth. He looked as if he was ready to shift his grip from coat to Murdoch's throat. Either that or throw him to the ground.

"Leave it, John," called out Seymour, and he grabbed Reordan by the shoulder. "Stop this at once. Will's a good friend of mine."

For several more moments, Reordan continued to glare into Murdoch's face, then reluctantly he loosened his hold while Murdoch shifted his weight to the balls of his feet, ready to defend himself again if need be. Finally, the Irishman lowered his gaze and Murdoch released his grip on his wrists. He had no intention of being manhandled again.

"Sir, I don't know what your moan is all about but I won't stand for any man, crippled or not, grabbing me."

Seymour quickly got in between them.

"You've no need to fight my battles for me, John."

Murdoch was about to say, "That's just an excuse for the fellow," but he stopped himself and stepped back a little way. His heart was thudding.

Reordan swayed slightly on his crippled leg and Seymour slipped an arm around his waist to ease him into the chair. "My God, man, we can't be fighting our friends. We've got to save that for the real enemy."

"I didn't like the way he was after talking to you."

"You're not the only hot head around here. Will can get as fired up as you but he's a man of honour."

Reordan muttered, "That's hard to believe, he's a frog, isn't he."

"Yes, and I told you he's a friend. Now let's you and him shake hands and, John, you started it, you should apologize."

"That's all right, Charlie," said Murdoch. "Mr. Reordan was correct in saying I was speaking in a certain tone of voice that was uncalled for. I apologize to you for that."

"Well, while we're all apologizing, I'm sorry too, Will. I know you're only trying to help me." Seymour ruffled his own thin hair so it stood up in wisps. "I think we all could do with a nip of brandy. Strictly medicinal, John, don't worry." He walked over to his bookcase, moved aside a couple of fat volumes, reached to the back of the shelf, and took out a bottle. He handed it to Murdoch first. "You'll have to swig, I don't have any glasses up here."

Murdoch took the bottle, unscrewed the top, and swallowed down a gulp, passing the bottle to Seymour, who did likewise, then gave it to Reordan, who indulged in a curiously ladylike sip. He wiped his lips with the back of his hand.

"So why are you riding Charlie?" he said. "Why don't you chase after real criminals? They aren't hard to find. Just look under a rock and you get any number of bosses."

Seymour frowned a warning. "John. We're keeping to my business alone."

"Let him say his piece, Charlie. He might not be aware of the reality of the situation."

"No, Will. It was me you wanted to hear from."

Reordan stabbed his finger in the air. "Say on, Mr. Frog. I'm as aware of reality, as you call it, as the next man. Get it off your chest whatever it is."

Murdoch was thoroughly exasperated by the man and his rudeness and his own voice matched it, in spite of himself and his pity. "You call Charlie a friend and so do I, but he is in danger of losing his job. He's a bloody good sergeant but that's it for his career if it happens. He won't be taken on by any other police force in the country."

"Maybe not such a loss," snapped Reordan.

"To him it would be. If you're such a good friend, you'd know that. It's not just a *job*."

The Irishman glanced over at the sergeant, whose expression said it all.

Murdoch pressed on. "He's been doing something that is against the law, as written on the statutes. Somebody knows about it and has been sending anonymous letters to the inspector in order to get him dismissed. Charlie, however, refuses to clear his name or give me any information so I can help him because he says there are other people involved. I presume you are one of those people, Mr. Reordan. So what is it you're going to do? Let

your friend slide down the drain or come clean and let me in on what this is all about?"

Reordan gaped at him, then at Seymour. "Charlie?"

Seymour replaced the cap on the bottle and put it on the lamp table. "I told Will that the secrets weren't mine to reveal."

There was a brief silence, then Reordan grimaced. "Hey, you can have my secret any time you want. I ain't ashamed of it. If it would help the frog to tell him about the Knights, you have my permission, no question."

Murdoch leaped on his statement. "The Knights? You mean the Knights of Labour? I thought they'd dissolved."

Reordan was indignant. "We ain't going under. We've still got work to do."

"Do you belong to the Knights of Labour, Charlie? Is that it?"

Seymour made fists with his hands and bumped them together. Finally, he answered.

"Yes, I do. And yes, I am quite aware I could get the bird because of it. As our illustrious inspector is forever reminding us." He stuck his thumbs in his waistband and gave a fair imitation of Brackenreid's posture and voice. "'Gentlemen, a police officer must always be without partisanship.'"

"Them's all fancy words for saying that frogs toady to employers and them that already has," scoffed Reordan. "Talk about justice being blind, frogs make up for that by having a great nose for what's going to keep them smelling sweet."

"Give it a bone, Reordan, I'd like to hear what else Charlie has to say."

Seymour got to his feet. His face had brightened and his voice was that of an enthusiast. "This isn't any ordinary labour group, Will. The full name is The Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labour and it is an appropriate one."

Murdoch shrugged. "Maybe so but it's still a secret society and a labour group."

"I'm aware of that but hear me out. They—that is, *we* – want to work toward permanent justice for every human soul, not just for one small class of society. I've come to believe deeply in their philosophy."

To Murdoch it was coming to sound more and more like a religion. "The stern-looking cove in the hall with the altar in front of his portrait, I gather he's a Knight too?"

Seymour ignored the jibe. He was too eager to tell Murdoch, for all the world as if he were a young man trying to convince a stern father that his choice of a bride was a good one.

"That's the founder, Uriah Stephens. He began the Order in Philadelphia in 1869. The Canadian chapters have shrunk a bit, more's the pity, but we're still going."

"There was a symbol in the corner, what's that signify?"

"Let me tell him," interrupted Reordan like an eager schoolboy. "The principles of the order are secrecy, obedience, and mutual assistance. The three lines of the triangle indicate the three elements essential to man's existence and happiness: land, labour, and love. The circle is the bond of unity by which the membership is bound together." Like Seymour, Reordan was speaking as fervently as any priest.

"That all sounds very noble, no, hold on, I'm not poking fun at you, it does sound noble. I'm all for it. The problem is that no police officer, including Charlie, can belong to a labour organization." He nodded over at Seymour. "Are you going to resign from the Knights?"

"No."

"And you don't want to resign from the police force?"

"No."

"Christ help us, Charlie, you can't do both."

"Why shouldn't he?" burst out Reordan. "He's been doing both for months now and nobody's come to harm."

“Look, I agree with you, but I’m not the police chief. He’ll lose his job.”

Seymour did the punching movement again. “God, Will. I don’t know what to do. I’m like a man with two wives and I’d swear on a bible I loved both of them. I don’t know how the hell I’m going to choose.”

Reordan addressed Seymour. “Perhaps your pal needs to know more about reality as I’ve seen it, Charlie. Maybe then he’d comprehend better why you ain’t going to give up the Knights easily.”

Seymour hesitated. “If you want to, John, but I don’t think it changes the situation that much. I’ll still have to make a decision.”

Reordan turned to Murdoch. “Do you want to hear my story?”

Murdoch bit back his reply. “Go ahead.”

Reordan touched his scarred face. “You’ve probably been wondering how I got burned like this. I would never have survived if it weren’t for the Knights. They saved me.” He stretched out his hand. “But before I go on, you’d better give me a swallow of that brandy.” Seymour handed over the bottle and Reordan drank some with the gasp of a man unaccustomed to liquor.

“It weren’t no accident. It was done deliberate. I was tarred and feathered, you see.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Murdoch waited while Reordan took another drink of the brandy, a much bigger sip this time.

"I got these burns nine months ago. I was working in Ottawa at the Perley and Pettee sawmill. Have you heard of them?"

Murdoch nodded. "There was a big strike there that eventually involved all the mills in the area but it ended badly, I recall."

Reordan scowled at him. "I hope by that remark you mean it ended badly for the workers, not the bosses. They made piss-all concessions."

"I did mean it ended badly for the workers. They couldn't hold out."

His comment agitated the Irishman and he got to his feet and began to hobble up and down the small room. Seymour watched him and Murdoch could see he was ready to jump in at any moment if need be.

"For sure we couldn't hold out because we were almost starving before the strike and even with relief money, men with families couldn't endure. The wives of the bosses sat around in their silk and satin while our wives went in rags and fed their bairns cold water to stave off the hunger

pangs. All we asked was a ten-hour day and that the wages be restored to what they were which was pitiful enough. I was bringing in seven dollars a week and I was a single man and could hardly live on it.” Reordan’s face was contorted with old anger. “All the workers at the Pettee mill and the nearby mills had stopped work. My foreman, a bastard by the name of Napoleon Leblanc, had ordered a shutout. But we had dragged ourselves through a terrible summer of near starvation and we were determined not to give in. We’d have had too, though, if it weren’t for the Knights who came in to organize matters.” He paused. “The bosses called them ‘walking agitators,’ like their own workers were too stupid or too downtrodden to rise up against them. Well, that weren’t the case. When I heard what the Knights had to say, I joined up in a flash...And you despise us, no doubt.”

“I rather you didn’t put words into my mouth, or thoughts into my head that aren’t mine, sir. I have no reason to despise an organization of which I know little but what I do know has been favourable.”

Reordan was only slightly mollified. He was hell bent on hating somebody and Murdoch, the policeman, was as good a target as any.

“Like I said, we were determined to hold out. Then on the night of April 13, we heard that the bosses were bringing in scabs from Quebec. A lot of the men were at the boil when they got that news. They wanted to go and burn down the bosses’ houses and make a fight of it. But Jamie Paterson, who was one of our leaders, was as smart as a fox. ‘That’s what the bosses want, lads,’ he says to us. ‘They want the world to see us as a mob without morals or brains. Well we won’t give them that satisfaction.’ He says as how he wouldn’t put it past the bosses to set the scabs on a rampage and say it was us as did the damage. So he wanted four or five of us to go out on the watch and keep the property safe against anybody who come to pillage, don’t matter whether they’re calling themselves friend or

foe. Well, it took a bit of persuading. There were a lot of hot heads in our own group at the end of their tether and they were ready to set fire to those big mansions stuffed with the food we had put on their tables. But finally they agreed.” He stood still, staring in to space as if he were watching his own story projected on the wall. “So that’s how it come that Saturday night, there I was sitting outside the boss’s house keeping watch. There was young Sam Gibson and me. We’d been issued with pistols, the both of us, which made us feel we could take on anybody as need be. It had turned cool and we were huddled around a brazier to keep warm, which was why we didn’t even see the scabs till they was on us. So much for our guns. There were two of them, muffled up with scarves so’s they wouldn’t be recognized. And they were on us in a flash. Sam was closer to them than me and as he turned to see what was happening, one of them smashed him in the jaw with his billy. They got me pinned to the ground before I could utter a peep and shoved a rag in my mouth. I was trussed and hogtied in seconds.”

Reordan wet his lips but didn’t face Murdoch. “The one who had hit Sam says to me, ‘We heard you fellows was talking of tarring and feathering the scabs. Is that true?’ I couldn’t answer even I’d wanted to. There had been loose talk about what we’d do to scabs if they was brought in, but it was just talk as far as I was concerned. ‘Is it true?’ said the fellow again and he kicked me good in the chest. I tried to shake my head but he weren’t looking for an answer. ‘We don’t like that,’ he says with another kick. ‘We’ve as much right to work as you do.’ The other fella didn’t utter a word, just him. He was the leader. Then he goes, ‘So we thought we do a bit of tarring up ourselves,’ he says. I could smell hot tar and then I saw they’d brought a bucket of pitch with them and a sack. ‘It’s got to be hotter,’ he says to the other cove like he was asking for a cup of tea. ‘The feathers won’t stick else. And we want them to stick. We want all you lads to see what scabs can do back if they’re pressed.’ I tried to

struggle but they had the better of me. The one talking gave me the boots again and again and I could hear the crack as my thigh bone shattered. He laughed when he heard that, like he was enjoying himself.”

He stopped talking and took another swig of the whisky. Seymour stood up and took him by the arm.

“John, you aren’t going to find peace in that bottle. Do you want me to tell the rest of it?”

The Irishman was trembling violently and Murdoch’s own mouth had gone dry at the horror of the story. Reordan allowed Seymour to lead him to the chair and he collapsed into it, his head in his hands. The older man touched his shoulder gently.

“There wasn’t anything you could do to defend yourself.”

Reordan looked up and his eyelids were red, the scars on his head livid and raw. “Or Sam, right? I couldn’t help Sam either.”

Seymour waited for a moment, gripping the man’s shoulder until he gained more control. “The leader turned on Sam next—”

“He was just a lad,” cried Reordan.

“He was that and he’d been knocked unconscious with the billy so he couldn’t resist either. They poured hot tar over him and then rolled him in the heap of feathers they’d dumped on the ground. John was next.”

Seymour’s voice was matter of fact, not from lack of feeling so much as controlled outrage. “The tar was almost at the boil and immediately burned his skin wherever it touched.”

Reordan held up his hand. “I’ll tell him the rest,” he whispered. “Maybe it’ll help him understand.” He licked his dry lips. “They rolled me in the feathers the way they had with Sam Gibson. Then the short guy, the talker, looks down at me and says, ‘Let’s have pity here. Poor cove’s burning

up. He needs cooling off.' He made a gesture to the other fella. 'Go on,' he says, 'cool his head off.'"

He couldn't continue and Charlie again spoke for him. "The man undid his trousers and made his water-on John."

Reordan held up his hand. "That's enough for now."

Murdoch's neck tightened. "I assume these men were never caught," he said after a moment.

Reordan spoke so quietly he could hardly hear him. "Of course not. They was helped to get away because the bosses were glad about what had happened to us, even though both Sam and me were hurt real bad. They thought it might make us workers buckle under."

"It did just the opposite, I'm happy to say," interjected Seymour. "They held the strike for three more months."

"But there must have been an investigation?"

"I'm ashamed to admit it, Will," said Charlie. "but the local police officers were in sympathy with the bosses. They did almost nothing. The two men have never been found or their identity discovered. Their faces were hidden and all John could offer was a general description of height. The leader was short and he talked with some kind of accent. He had a raspy voice, but the scarf muffled everything and he was most likely trying to disguise his voice. The man who defiled John was about six feet tall and seemed the younger of the two."

Reordan looked over at Murdoch. "I'm going to find them some day, don't you doubt it."

Seeing the look in the man's eyes, Murdoch didn't.

"I didn't get no compensation," Reordan continued.

"The boss said I wasn't injured while doing my work even though it was his frigging property I was trying to protect. I'd have been in a bad way if it weren't for the Knights. They paid for a doctor and gave me a stipend to keep me going. I don't have no family, but Mrs. Pangbourn, who used to live here, is my aunt. She had to go take care of her sister in Vancouver so she asked me to come here and run the house

for her. Charlie, here, was already a boarder so he stayed on, then Amy and Wilkinson joined us. I ain't too proud to tell you, Detective Murdoch, that these folks keep me alive. It ain't just the money they gives me, it's that they treat me decent as they would any other human being. And in return I'm what you might call their bulldog. I might be crippled but I'm still capable of a good bite if need be."

Murdoch stood up and walked over to him. "You're as strong a man as I've encountered, John Reordan. Will you shake my hand now? I'm not here as an enemy but as a friend."

At first, he thought the Irishman would spurn him but he stared into Murdoch's eyes for a moment, then smiled slightly. "Like I said, I'm a bulldog sort of fellow. I can smell out friends." He took his hand.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Reordan declared they could all do with a mug of tea and he limped off downstairs to make it. At his leaving, Murdoch could feel himself letting out a breath he didn't even realize he'd been holding. Seymour went to the desk.

"Do you fancy a pipe, Will?"

"I do, thank you."

Seymour took out a clay pipe and a packet of tobacco from the drawer. "Badger suit you?"

"It will."

Murdoch had his own utility French briar in his pocket and he stuffed it with the aromatic dark tobacco that Seymour offered. Neither of them spoke until their pipes were lit and drawn.

"That's a terrible story Reordan has to tell," said Murdoch.

"It is indeed and I doubt we'll ever find out who did it, more's the pity."

They smoked in silence for a while, each lost in his own thoughts. Murdoch had no doubt how he would have felt in those circumstances and how corrosive would be the desire for revenge. He sighed and brought himself back to the present.

“So tell me a bit more about this organization you’re so enamoured of. I thought they were almost non-existent in Ontario now. Faded like hothouse flowers in winter.” He deliberately made his tone ironic to see Seymour’s reaction. He got one. The sergeant’s voice was sharp.

“Not exactly. They’re smaller in numbers now, unfortunately, but still fighting for justice for every human soul.”

“A noble aim indeed but unrealistic, don’t you think?”

“I’m surprised to hear you, of all people, say that, Will. You’re a man who fights for justice too in your own way.”

Murdoch puffed out a cloud of smoke. “I *enforce* the law, Charlie, that’s different.” This wasn’t the time to launch into a philosophical exploration of the problems of enforcing laws that seemed cruel or unfair. It was an issue Murdoch was constantly uneasy about and had not resolved in his own mind, except that on more than one occasion he had chosen to interpret the law morally rather than literally.

Seymour placed his pipe carefully on the lamp table beside him. “Let me read you something, Will.” He went to his bookcase and took down a fat binder stuffed with newspapers. He untied the string, shuffled through the papers, and plucked one out. “Here we are. This was written by Mr. Kilt, editor of the *Ottawa Citizen*, in October of last year. Listen to this. ‘What hope is there for a society with such extremes of wealth and poverty as our civilization shows? At the bottom rotting, corroding want and squalor; at the top, enervating luxury, reckless extravagance, useless purposeless lives.’” Seymour paused and looked at Murdoch to see his reaction.

“I wouldn’t mind a taste of ‘enervating luxury’ before my life is over,” said Murdoch with a grin.

Seymour didn’t smile back. “It’s a taste people get addicted to. Let me continue...‘What hope of such a society except that it is susceptible of fundamental reform or radical change? Consider how fruitful it is of meanness, of over-

reaching, of envy, jealousy and all uncharitableness.'" Again he paused but Murdoch didn't risk a comment, just nodded to him to go on. Seymour's normally calm voice was full of passion.

"How can it be anything else? A society which in its industrial constitution is at war with honour, honesty and justice, is not likely to beget generosity. It inevitably generates the vices, not the virtues, the baser not the nobler qualities of the soul.'" He put down the paper as reverently as a priest might put down a piece of consecrated parchment. "You asked me if I believe in what The Noble and Holy Order of Knights stands for. That's my answer, Will."

"That's a radical view they hold. The only hope for society is fundamental reform? Smacks of anarchy to me."

"You're wrong about that. They are no destroyers of order, they believe in order, but a fair and just order where workers are accorded respect and treated with dignity. Surely you must agree with that, Will?"

"How can I not? But underneath the dazzling rhetoric that you just read to me, there is a bias. Meanness, envy, and lack of charity are not the exclusive prerogative of the rich."

Seymour frowned. "That is not the point. I am not green, Will. You can't be a police officer as long as I've been and not see depravity and viciousness in all walks of life, but that is no different from saying that a diseased body shows all manner of ugliness on its skin. If society is a balanced and equitable one, it is healthy and manifests such. There is no place for crime where there is no want."

Murdoch thought Seymour was omitting a large proportion of crimes for which the motive was human passion. The envelope of photographs on the desk was a mute testimony to that.

The sergeant went on. "Look at the charges that as police officers we lay. It is the poorer classes who are driven

to steal or even murder each other. How many charges are ever laid against the rich culls? One in a hundred?"

Murdoch drew some more on his pipe. "That doesn't mean the rich don't commit crimes, only that they aren't ever charged."

Seymour's normally impassive face was slightly flushed with the ardour of an acolyte. Their eyes met and to Murdoch's relief the sergeant suddenly laughed out loud.

"Will, you're looking at me as if I'm a candidate for the loony bin. I don't have a lance in my wardrobe nor a suit of armour. These are ideals I'm talking about. High ideals I know, but if we don't dare to dream of what might be, what are we?"

Murdoch jabbed at the air with his briar. "That I will concede."

The tension between them eased.

"When did you join the order?" Murdoch asked.

"September last year. But I should make it clear, the Knights don't uphold strikes and walkouts. They believe in negotiating with the bosses in a reasonable way."

Again Murdoch was struck by what he thought was sentimental thinking on the part of a man whom up to now he'd considered as down to earth and as clear-eyed as a collector of night soil.

"Do the Knights know you are a police sergeant, by the way?"

"No, but the only occupations officially barred are bankers, lawyers, gamblers, and saloon keepers."

Murdoch laughed. "A motley group who deserve each other."

"Indeed."

"How big are the meetings? Would somebody have recognized you?"

"Oh I can't believe it's one of the members who's doing the dirt. First, we take a solemn oath of loyalty to defend and protect each other and, second, our meetings are quite

small. There's been nobody I knew attending. But each assembly has regular meetings. Perhaps by bad chance, the Judas saw me going into the meeting hall. Could have been an old nab of mine wanting to get his own back."

Experienced officer that Seymour was, Murdoch could tell he was falling into the old trap of blame-the-stranger. The truth might be too painful.

"When did you ever know a lag to use such decorous language, not to mention that the letters are typewritten? And what puzzles me is why the man doesn't just come right out and say what you're up to? Why all the circumlocution?"

There was thumping on the stairs and Seymour got up to open the door. Reordan came in carrying a tray with three mugs and a plate of bread and butter. Seymour didn't offer to help him and Murdoch realized it must be a point of pride with the Irishman to manage by himself. He put the tray on the washstand. Unobtrusively, Seymour took over and passed one of the mugs to Murdoch.

Reordan took the other and slurped down some tea. He was noisy about it, not from bad manners but because scar tissue around his mouth made it difficult for him to drink properly.

"I heard the last bit. You two keep saying 'man,' but do you know for certain it's a boyo? It could be a missus."

"That's true, but it don't feel like woman's work? Wouldn't you say, Will?"

Murdoch blew on his mug of tea. He'd already discovered it was scalding hot. "We can't totally dismiss that as a possibility." He took a bite of a piece of bread.

"Sorry we don't have no jam," said Reordan. "But the bread's fresh-baked this morning."

"It's delicious," replied Murdoch, and it was. He was suddenly ravenous and munched through the thick, crusty slice. Reordan watched him, as proud as any cook

summoned to the dining room while the mistress sampled the baking.

“What would help is if we had a list of the members of your local assembly,” Murdoch said to Seymour.

“I don’t have anything like that. We keep all names secret to protect each other. It’s not so long ago that men lost their jobs if they were suspected of organizing the workers.”

Reordan winked at Murdoch. “I’ve got one. I earn my stipend from the Knights by keeping track of the dues. I’ve got a list. Shall I show it to him, Charlie?”

Seymour didn’t hesitate. “Thanks, John. A list would be helpful, can you bring it to us?”

Suddenly the Irishman cackled. He fished in his pocket. “I’ve got it here. Call yourselves police officers. It seems obvious to me that the person doing the letters has to be a member of the Knights or knows somebody that is.” So much for Seymour’s affirmation of unshakeable loyalty, thought Murdoch. Reordan handed over the paper. “I brought up the membership list of Excelsior. That’s the name of his local assembly,” he added for Murdoch’s benefit.

Seymour stood up and leaned over the chair back so he could read the list with Murdoch. There were twenty-five names, neatly printed.

“Course, the person could be registered under a false name,” said Reordan. “It’s happened before. The bosses want to keep an eye on their wicked workers, so they send in a spy.”

Suddenly, Murdoch stabbed the paper with his forefinger. “No! There it is. Or rather I should say, ‘There she is.’ Do you know this woman, Charlie?”

“Florence Gripe? Why yes, I’ve met her. But surely you’re not suggesting...?”

“Miss Gripe is presently engaged, and she eventually will become Mrs. Liam Callahan.”

“What! The station stenographer?”

“One and the same. I was introduced to her only last night at a typewriting competition. There’s your link right there.”

“Are you sure, Will?”

“It’s a very unusual name. I can’t believe there are two of them.”

“She seems such a fine young woman, I find it difficult to believe she would betray me.” Seymour looked acutely uncomfortable and Murdoch remembered the impression Florence’s admiring eyes had made on he himself.

Reordan wagged his finger at them. “There you go again. Overlooking the obvious. Her fiancée might have flushed you out without her intentionally revealing anything. This Callahan, he could have escorted her to a meeting, for instance, and ‘Lo, my goodness. Can I believe my eyes. There’s our esteemed sergeant filing in with the other plebs.’”

“You said something like that yourself, Charlie,” added Murdoch, “and it certainly answers the question of all the beating about the bush. Callahan probably doesn’t want his sweetheart to know what he’s doing.”

“All right. But why has he got it in for me?”

Reordan did the finger-wagging gesture again. “Don’t you police officers always ask who stands to gain by this crime? I’ve heard you talk about that lots of times, Charlie. My guess is that Callahan stands to benefit by you getting the shoot. My guess is that he wants your job.”

Murdoch smiled at the Irishman. “You’re putting us to shame, John. It makes sense. It’s impossible to climb up the ranks of the police force except when a spot opens up ahead of you. We’re not expanding at all this year, nor next in all probability. You can stay stuck in the same rank until your hair turns white and your teeth fall out.”

“And especially if you’re a Papist, which William here is.”

Murdoch grimaced. “Especially if you’re a Papist.”

"I'm one too," Reordan jumped in. "It ain't easy. That's another reason I respect the Knights of Labour, they don't care who you bow to, or bend the knee to, or whatever the Protestants do."

"Hold on, you two. Let's get back on track here. You're saying that Callahan wants my job? But he's only a constable, second class. It wouldn't go to him."

"Not directly," said Murdoch. "The choice would be one of the two first-class constables, Fyfer or Crabtree. Let's say for the sake of argument that you left and George was moved up to sergeant. His position then would need filling. There are several constables, second class, who could take it. In jumps the hardworking Mr. Callahan. Better wages, better conditions."

"Not much better."

"But enough if you want to get married, and he surely does. I thought he was decidedly under Miss Gripe's spell. And my guess is she would be a rather expensive wife. Not to mention that she makes eyes at every man she comes across. Perhaps she trilled on about you to him, and he didn't like it. Come on, Charlie, did you flirt with the girl?"

The sergeant actually blushed. "Not flirt exactly, but she is a very sweet young woman. I didn't know she was engaged to be married. She never spoke of it."

"There you go then. I'd say Callahan got jealous and wanted you out of the way. Or at least disgraced and less eligible."

Seymour was shaking his head. "It's hard to believe, Will. He seems like such a pleasant young fellow."

"Too pleasant for me. He's an arse crawler. No wonder he and our inspector get along so famously. Besides, he's a liar. He told me a lie, a small one to be sure, but it makes me question what else he might be hiding." Briefly he related the story of the typewriting competition and Callahan's unexpected appearance. "He pretended he isn't accomplished when he is, but why not tell the truth? I saw

him on that platform and he wanted to win, probably at all costs. Ambition to burn in that young man. One of his jobs at the station is to sort the daily post, so he could easily slip in a letter or two. And he is a stenographer. I haven't had a chance to check his typewriting machine against the letters, but Mrs. Jones, er, a woman I know, says they were typed on a Remington, and that is the machine used in most offices these days. When I asked him about typing, he covered his trouser seat by pretending he didn't know how, not realizing I had a friend who was in the same contest. No wonder he was shocked to see me. It's him all right, Charlie."

"But what do we do now? Even if we unmask him, I'll have to admit my involvement with the Knights and that's it for the police force. He'll probably only get a reprimand."

Murdoch thought Seymour was sitting on the fence. He would have to make a choice sooner or later. But he couldn't abide blackmailers, which was what Callahan was.

"I'll think of something."

The worry left Seymour's face and he laughed. "If I know you at all, William Murdoch, you will most certainly think of something and it will be highly moral but probably quite illegal."

"I'll drink to that," said Reordan and he lifted his mug of tea in a salute.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Shortly afterwards, Reordan said he had work to do and left them. All this while, the envelope with the other photographs had sat unopened on the desk. Seymour got up and went over and picked it up.

"I'd better have a look at these."

"I warn you, it's ugly," said Murdoch.

The sergeant sat in the cane chair opposite and slid the photographs out. He snorted in derision at the Newly-wed photographs, but when he saw the picture of Agnes, his jaw clenched.

"My God, Will, surely this isn't Amy's pupil? She never told me it was this kind of thing she was concerned about."

"Miss Slade said she discovered them in the girl's desk, but the child would offer no explanation. She wants me to find out who the photographer is and is hoping that I can keep the police out of it officially until we know what's happened. Frankly, I don't know if I can do that and conduct a proper investigation, but I said I'd try."

Seymour, in an unconscious imitation of the schoolteacher's reaction, inverted the photograph.

"You must have thought my little speech about an unhealthy society somewhat naive. I find this kind of thing

incomprehensible. Poor Amy to ever have had to see it.”

“And poor Agnes.”

“Quite. Is she the one who wrote the obscenities on the mourning card?”

“Probably. Miss Slade was fairly certain it was the girl’s hand.”

Seymour gazed at the photograph of the dead baby. “It’s hard to believe that a young girl would deface a picture such as this. Where would she have learned such words?”

“Miss Slade says the girl’s father is a complete ne’er-do-well. I met him and I’d concur with that. The mother is dead and there has been no mitigating influence, if there was indeed a maternal one, except for the classroom and Miss Slade.”

“And if ever a woman would provide a mitigating influence, as you put it, she would.”

Seymour’s expression was fond but Murdoch thought it revealed a fraternal fondness and once again he was annoyed with himself for caring about that.

“Do you think Agnes was coerced into posing for the stereoscopic picture? Or was she paid?”

“I don’t know. I haven’t been able to question her myself. She hasn’t returned to school. I spoke to her brother, but other than saying she might be with an older sister who is in service he wasn’t helpful. And now that Leonard Sims has been found dead, I’m very worried about the girl’s involvement.”

Seymour picked up the other photograph. “Have you covered up his parts because he’s naked?”

“Yes. I might have to show that picture around.”

“The black border and the scratching out of the two faces look as if they have been done with the same pen and ink, so I assume it’s Agnes’s work too.” The sergeant replaced the picture in the envelope. “What have you done so far?”

Quickly Murdoch related his visits to Gregory's Emporium and the other two studios.

"Gregory's is the closest to the Sackville Street School and Agnes's house. I didn't like the fellow who owns the place, but I couldn't find anything to link him to the stereoscopic pictures or the mourning card."

"I can understand your rationale for starting there, but the child could have met them anywhere. We should check every studio in the city."

"I know. Unfortunately, there's nothing to say the photographs have even come from a studio. What do they need? A camera and a set? Not much more."

He took his cabinet pictures from his pocket and handed them to Seymour. "I had my portrait taken at the Emporium."

Seymour grinned. "You look very prosperous, Will."

"I was imagining I was Inspector Brackenreid. But, as you can see, the backdrops aren't like anything in either of the cards. I managed to have a look inside the cupboard in the studio but there was nothing that corresponded." He knocked out the tobacco from his pipe. "Really, the only two leads I have at the moment are, first, the baby's mourning card and the place where the older sister is working. The baby's picture looks as if it was taken by a different photographer, but it was in Agnes's possession so it might lead us somewhere. Her brother thinks she got them from Martha, the older girl, which is a second reason to find her."

Seymour echoed his gravity. "I agree. What do you want me to do?"

"I'd like you to go to the library and check the death columns in the newspapers for the past six months. Make a list of all the children about three or four months of age who have died. We'll divide up the numbers and go and see if they had mourning cards made and if so what photographer they used. At the same time, I'd like to check the Help

Wanted columns and see if anybody was advertising for a servant girl before and including June of last year.”

Seymour chuckled. “You’d be surprised at how easy that might be. I don’t even have to go outside.” He stood up. “Come on.”

Murdoch put the envelope in his pocket and followed Seymour downstairs. The sergeant knocked on Reordan’s door. “John, it’s me again. Can we have a word?”

The Irishman opened the door promptly and a wave of stale air came out of his room.

“Will here needs to search through some newspapers and we were wondering if you could give us a hand.”

Reordan’s eyes brightened. “My pleasure. Come in to the library.”

The Irishman stepped aside and gestured them into his room. Murdoch had never seen anything quite like it. There were stacks of newspapers on every inch of the floor and little else in the room except a filing cabinet and a narrow bed. Pathways wound in and out of the stacks. The three of them were crowded awkwardly in the tiny space left to let the door open.

“John is the Knights record keeper,” said Seymour. “He keeps track of any publicity that the Knights receive in all of the newspapers in the country as well as any news events that might be of concern to us.”

Reordan beamed. “I keep a record of everything. This might look like a maze but it ain’t. I know where everything is.” He was clearly very proud of his accomplishment, but Murdoch was in danger of suffocating from the lack of fresh air in the room and the amount of newspaper there was.

“What are you looking for exactly?”

“We need names and addresses of all families who suffered the bereavement of a male infant over the past six months.”

“Right you are.”

"I'd also like names and addresses of any people advertising for a servant girl during the month of June last year. And if you can tell me which of those stopped advertising in July, I'll be forever in your debt."

"Done."

"How long do think it will take?"

"I'll help," interjected Seymour.

"In that case, an hour, an hour and a half at the most."

Reordan looked at him. "Am I to know what for?"

Murdoch hesitated. "With regard to the bereaved families we're trying to find out if they have had any dealings with a particular photographer we want to question. The servant girl is somebody we'd like to talk to."

"Good enough."

He shuffled off toward the wooden filing cabinet and Murdoch beckoned Seymour into the hall.

"While you're doing that, I'm going to go see if I can shake some information from Agnes's father."

Seymour grimaced. "Be careful, Will."

"Don't worry. I'm the soul of tact."

"Ha!"

Seymour let him out and, once on the street, Murdoch breathed in deep drafts of the chill air as if he could clean out both Reordan's story and Agnes's plight. He couldn't. He only succeeded in making himself cough.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Fisher wasn't at home, so as much as he wanted to get his hands on the man, Murdoch couldn't. Once again, young Mrs. Tibbett answered the door and smiled shyly at him. She didn't know where Fisher had gone, she said, but probably to one of the local taverns. Ben wasn't in the house either. Still posing as a truant officer, Murdoch repeated that Agnes's teacher was anxious about her, but, when pressed, Kate could give no further information as to where the girl might be. Murdoch thought she was troubled about something, but one of the twins set up a wail in the background and she hurried away.

He left, briefly contemplated trying to find Fisher's rookery but decided against it. He wasn't likely to get much information out of him if he was drunk and he was still acting on the premise that the man wasn't aware of what his daughter was up to. Murdoch didn't know how long he could keep the situation quiet, but he could understand why Amy Slade hadn't wanted to report the girl to the police. A couple of years ago, the inspector had received a letter from a woman who claimed that her next-door neighbour was trying to force connections on his own daughter, a girl of ten. She said the girl herself had told her so. Murdoch had

been sent to investigate and he found a situation of appalling poverty and misery. The child's mother was a hopeless drunk, as was the father. At that time, the girl, younger even than Agnes Fisher, had, with great fear, whispered it was true what she'd confided to the neighbour. A charge of rape had been brought against her father. However, when the case came to court, the girl, like Aggie, was unable to speak or confirm what she had said. The judge, an arrogant irascible old man, couldn't or wouldn't understand that she was terrified and he'd sentenced her to three months for contempt of court. She was sent to the Mimico Girl's Industrial School. And that was the end of her. Murdoch tried to keep track of her after the sentence was served, but the family left the city and she disappeared with them.

He pulled his muffler tighter against the damp, cold air and began to walk in the direction of the Smithers house on Church Street, near Gerrard. At least he could report back to Brackenreid that he had done something.

The house was large but not in a state of good repair. An elderly butler ushered him into a musty-smelling and cold drawing room festooned everywhere in black crepe. Here, Mrs. Smithers, a woman who must have been well over seventy, was sitting hunched over a meagre fire. She was in mourning dress. Opposite her was another woman in the plain grey gown of a servant. She, too, was elderly and bent with age. She got to her feet when Murdoch was announced and came over to him. Her face was haggard and her eyes were red from weeping. The butler remained in the room.

"Oh, Mr. Murdoch. Thank goodness you're here. Perhaps the mistress will listen to you."

The mistress, in fact, showed no indication that this would be the case. She hadn't even turned around but sat staring into the fire and muttering. Murdoch went closer.

"Mrs. Smithers, I'm Detective Murdoch. Inspector Brackenreid sent me to talk to you. You are missing a

brooch, I believe.”

The old lady looked up at him. “After all these years, and all I’ve done for, to turn against me like this.”

“Who is that, ma’am?”

Mrs. Smithers jerked her head in the direction of her maid-servant. “Her, of course, Carlyle.”

Murdoch could see the other woman’s body tremble as if she had been struck and he threw a sympathetic glance over at her.

“My mother-in-law gave that brooch to me when I was married,” continued Mrs. Smithers. She looked up at a sombre painting that was hung over the fireplace. The frame was also draped in black crepe and the subject, a short, plump woman, bore a strong resemblance to Queen Victoria. A cherub smiled down from the right corner. “It can never be replaced, never,” sniffed Mrs. Smithers.

Tears were running down her face and mucus from her nose that she didn’t bother to wipe away. Carlyle came over to her and offered her a handkerchief, but Mrs. Smithers slapped her hand away like a petulant child.

“Don’t try to make up to me, you thief. I know you’ve taken it to the Jews.”

The maid turned to Murdoch. “Oh, sir. I never touched it, I swear to you. She says she’s going to turn me out without a reference. What will I do? How can she believe I would ever rob her? I have been a true servant to this family since I was a girl.”

“I can vouch for that, sir,” said the butler, casting an anxious glance at Mrs. Smithers.

Murdoch crouched down, closer to the old woman, so he could get her attention. He took out his notebook and pencil. “And when was the last time you saw the brooch, ma’am?”

“It was on my dressing table the night before Mother Smithers passed away. I know that without the shadow of a

doubt because I picked it up and showed it to her. She recognized it, I know she did, and she smiled.”

Murdoch stood up. “Has the house been searched?” he asked the butler.

“Turned upside down three times, sir. It is nowhere to be found. We only keep three servants. Miss Carlyle and myself and a cook, Mrs. Walden. She too has been with the family for many years and she is above reproach.” He lowered his voice. “If I may say, sir, the piece of jewellery in itself is not of particular value. It is what it means to Mrs. Smithers.”

She, however, heard that. “It is priceless. A silver circlet with five garnets. I know that Mother Smithers would only have given me a brooch of great value.” Her vacuous pale blue eyes stared into Murdoch’s. “They are in it together. Both Carlyle and Hunter are in cahoots. They think that I will die soon and they can live off the proceeds. Well, they have another think coming. I have left them provided for in my will but not any more. I’m calling for my solicitor right away to change all that. And I will never give either of them good characters.”

Murdoch stood up and beckoned to the butler to move away with him out of earshot. Miss Carlyle was literally wringing her hands and Mrs. Smithers was back to talking into the fire.

“Is there another family member who might help here?”

“Only a nephew who lives in America. I have written to him, to beg him to intervene, but he is not on good terms with his aunt and even if he believed Miss Carlyle and myself, I don’t know if he would have any influence with our mistress.”

Hunter was a slim, white-haired man of great dignity. Murdoch had the impression that all his working life he had strived to be the perfect butler, loyal, unobtrusive, and efficient, probably a great snob. But now, his world was torn apart and looked bleak indeed.

"Do you have any idea what might have happened to the brooch?"

"I've racked my brains, sir. Mrs. Smithers in the past few years has become increasingly forgetful and we have often found articles that were not in their correct places. But as I say, we have searched the house from top to bottom and not come across anything. We were all quite upset because Mrs. Smithers senior had passed on so I assume in the confusion, madam misplaced the brooch somewhere in the house."

Murdoch gave the butler a warning nod and went back to the old woman. "Mrs. Smithers, Inspector Brackenreid is taking your case very seriously. We have received reports that there are gypsies in the area and we are sure it is there we will find our culprits. I think you can put your mind at rest about your servants, ma'am. I for one believe them to be totally trustworthy and I am a police officer."

She glanced up at the dour portrait and clasped her hands together as if in prayer. She started to rock slightly. "Oh, Mother Smithers would never forgive me."

"I'm sure she will understand it is not your fault, ma'am. She will not hold you accountable."

He'd been shooting in the dark but his words seemed to hit a bull's eye. Mrs. Smithers's face flooded with delight.

"Do you not think so, sir? Oh I do hope you are right."

"I'm sure I am. Now can I have your solemn promise that you will not blame Miss Carlyle any more? You need somebody to take care of you after all you've been through. You don't want to drive her away now, do you?"

She shook her head and sniffed. "I promise. How dreadful of those wretched gypsies to cast suspicions like that. They must be punished."

"Indeed they will be, ma'am."

She caught his hand with her dust-dry fingers. "You will find the brooch though, won't you?"

"We'll do our best, ma'am."

He stepped away and the maid slipped in closer to her mistress, picked up the discarded handkerchief, and handed it to her. This time it was accepted and Mrs. Smithers patted Carlyle's hand.

"May I show you out, sir?" Hunter asked.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Smithers. I will come back to see you next week."

"Good afternoon. My compliments to Inspector Brackenreid."

Murdoch followed the butler into the hall.

"Should we have concerns about gypsies, sir?"

"I don't think so. Let's say I was stretching the truth a little. Your mistress needs the attention of a physician, Mr. Hunter."

"We are aware of that, sir, but she has been most resistant. And all this dreadful fuss for a trinket. Miss Carlyle has given her lifeblood to the Smithers family, as have I, myself." His polite mask dropped briefly. "My mistress tells anybody who will listen that the brooch was silver with garnets, but in fact it was silver-coated and stones are missing. It is hardly worth two dollars and for this she would cast out her faithful servants."

Murdoch nodded with some sympathy. At the door, the butler paused. "Excuse me, sir. I know this is most unorthodox, but may I shake you by the hand? Both Miss Carlyle and I have been at our wit's end. You seem to have calmed her down."

His voice cracked for a moment. They both knew that the calm was probably temporary and before long the delusions would reassert themselves in a different form. If Mrs. Smithers insisted on dismissing them, there wasn't much they could do to prevent her. Murdoch shook his hand.

Murdoch hadn't walked far when he heard the sound of horse's hooves behind him and, on the spur of the moment,

decided he'd take the luxury of a cab ride. It felt as if it had been a long day.

He turned around. The side flag was up, signifying the cabbie was free for hire and Murdoch waved at him. The coachman was heavy with his greatcoat, thick muffler, and fur hat, only his eyes visible. He flicked his whip in acknowledgement of Murdoch's signal and pulled his horse over to the curb.

"Hop in, sir."

"Actually I want to ask you some questions. I'll ride up there with you."

"Suit yourself, sir. Come to the North Pole."

Murdoch climbed up beside him and gave him the address on River Street.

"Walk on," the cabbie called to his horse and off they went. "What you want to know? Don't tell me, you're going to rag on me about Ned, here? He's a miserly looking wretch, but I treat him good. He's always looked that way."

"It's nothing like that. I'm trying to trace the movements of certain men who may have hired a cab to go down to the lake within the past two weeks. They would have been carrying a heavy piece of luggage, possibly at night."

"Wasn't no fare of mine. I'd remember that."

"Did you hear any of the other cabbies talking about it?"

The cabbie's eyebrows were bushy, greying, and eloquent. "Are we referring to smugglers or has somebody absconded with your wife?"

"No, no. Sorry, I forgot to introduce myself. I'm Acting Detective Murdoch from Number Four Station. I'm pursuing an investigation."

"And I'm Mr. Frobisher practising survival in the North Pole."

Murdoch pulled off his glove so he could remove a calling card from his pocket. He handed it to the cabbie, who looked it over carefully, then handed it back.

"All right. I believe you."

He tugged off his glove. "The name's McCrae, Tom McCrae."

Murdoch shook hands, then took out the photograph of Sims.

"Have you ever seen this fellow?"

The cabbie shook his head. "And I'd remember, believe me, if a tarted-up nancy boy in a state of undress got into the cab." He grinned. "Trying to nab him, are you?"

"As a matter of fact, he's dead. He's been murdered. I'm after the killer."

McCrae didn't actually say *serves him right*, but it was obvious from his expression that he felt that way.

"The fellow's name was Leonard Sims and he was involved in the taking and probable sale of obscene photographs."

McCrae frowned. "There you go then."

"Has anybody ever approached you to buy or sell obscene photographs? Where would they find pictures like that?"

"I've had all sorts of human kind in my cab, Mr. Murdoch, and I've been asked that before and worse, but the answer is no. I make it a point not to know. To tell you the truth, riff-raff like that I usually turf out. I stop the cab and open the door."

"Do you think any of the other cabbies would know where to find those kind of photographers?"

"If they did, they ain't likely to tell you. Not all of them are good, hard-working lads like me."

Murdoch thought it was an avenue he'd pursue later if the other search didn't pan out. McCrae seemed to have retreated into his greatcoat and Murdoch was afraid that, in spite of the official calling card, the cabbie thought he was inquiring to satisfy a personal lust. The life of a cabbie!

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Murdoch jumped down from the cab just as Amy Slade was walking up the path to the front door. She turned and Murdoch felt a rush of pleasure at seeing her.

“Mr. Murdoch, how nice. You are coming inside, I presume.”

Murdoch paid off the cabbie and followed her indoors. Reordan emerged immediately from the kitchen.

“Hello, Murdoch, come on in, I’ve got what you wanted. Hello, Amy, you look tired.”

“Mr. Kippen insisted on sitting in on my class for the entire afternoon, emanating waves of disapproval, I might add. He intimidated the children, who made all sorts of mistakes they don’t usually make. Then I had to remain to correct their papers.”

She sounded defeated and both men regarded her sympathetically for a moment. But Reordan was too excited to linger in that mood.

“Mr. Murdoch, we’ve been waiting. Charlie is in the kitchen. I have your lists for you.”

The temperature of his regard for Murdoch seemed to have increased considerably.

Amy and Murdoch divested themselves of their coats and hats and followed him to the kitchen, where they were greeted by a mouth-watering aroma from something cooking on the stove. Murdoch realized it had been hours since he'd eaten the fresh bread that Reordan had provided and he was hungry. Seymour stood up when they entered, greeted Miss Slade warmly, and pulled out two chairs.

"What have you been doing?" Amy asked Murdoch.

"John and Charlie have drawn up a list for me of bereaved families. I'm trying to follow the mourning-card path, see if that will lead anywhere."

Amy cast a warning glance in Reordan's direction, who saw her. "Look ahere," he said to Murdoch. "I've been glad to help out, but I'm in the dark as to why. Surely you can tell me something? What do you take me for?"

Murdoch felt like quoting Seymour, "They aren't my secrets to reveal," but Amy took matters into her own hands.

"That seems only fair, John. But why don't we wait until you've finished your business?"

"Right ho," said Reordan. There was a sheet of paper on the table and he pushed it in front of Murdoch. "This is the first list I made. A lot of the announcements were repeated three or four times and several were in all of the papers. But I sifted out as best I could and you've got seventy-seven names there, fifteen of them were children under ten, and twelve of these were infants, stillbirths or babies of three months or less. Eight were males. That's the ones you wanted, right?"

"Correct."

"I marked them out separately. I also arranged them in order, starting with the closest to the house here. I kept them in line, as it were, so you won't have to wander all around the wrekin."

"I had the easier job," said Seymour. "More people were dying than in need of servants." He gave Murdoch another

piece of paper. "In June, there were six advertisements. Four were in the *Globe*, two repeated in the *World* and the *News*. Three had box numbers to reply to the newspaper, only three gave an address, but all of those continued to advertise in July and August so I don't think they're the ones we want. Only two didn't repeat their advertisement in July, one was in the *Junction* and the other, alas, gave only a box number. Both of those were in the *Globe*."

"The *Junction* is too far, I think. I can't imagine a girl walking from Sydenham Street to there. It would take her all day. But good work, thanks, John. I'll see if I can get the accounts from the newspaper tomorrow. Meanwhile," he stood up. "I'd better get going on this other list before it gets too late to make calls."

"Not until you've had some supper, surely?" Amy said. "I for one am famished and I can smell something delicious that I would suspect is John's famous ragout de pattes de cochon."

"It is. Or, in English, Mr. Murdoch, pig's feet stew. It's a French-Canadian dish."

"We can divide up the list, Will," said Seymour. "It'll go faster that way."

"I stand persuaded. Thank you." Murdoch conceded, as much as to the hunger pangs in his stomach as anything. Reordan beamed and limped over to the stove to serve the meal.

Murdoch turned to Amy. "Miss Slade, I will have to inform Inspector Brackenreid what I am doing. I've already been skating near the thin ice. I don't know if he'd approve of me tromping around the city upsetting people who have recently suffered a great loss." He grimaced. "I'm not implying our good inspector is a man of sensitivity because he's not, but he is jumpy about stirring up complaints."

Amy had laced her fingers in her lap. She didn't look at Murdoch when she said, "Perhaps I could be of help? Three people will make even more headway." She hurried on. "I

can be quite truthful about it. I can say one of my pupils is in difficulties and I am trying to trace her nearest relative through the photograph she gave her."

"Why? Why would a teacher go to that trouble?"

"I can only speak for myself. You forget I would be telling the truth."

Seymour interjected. "She's right, Will, and if anybody can get people to open up, Amy can."

Miss Slade stiffened. "Don't have any fear that I won't appear quite respectable, Mr. Murdoch."

"It's not that," Murdoch said, although the thought had crossed his mind, "Charlie and I are police officers. We have legitimacy."

"I'm not going to make an arrest, surely? We all have the right to ask questions of one another and we have an equal right to refuse to answer."

They were interrupted by Reordan's plunking down three bowls of steaming stew on the table. Thank goodness no little trotters were sticking out of the broth.

"Eat up, argue later."

Murdoch took a taste. The stew was rather on the bland side, the meat cooked to a pulp and mashed into balls. Definitely edible. He couldn't help noticing that Amy made no dainty protestations about how much food was in her dish, but tucked in with as much gusto as the men. The meal was full of odd contrasts. There was no cloth on the scrubbed pine table, but the plates were of fine, patterned china and the knives and forks, silver.

For the next few minutes they spoke little except to make polite comments about the ragout. There was a stiffness between Murdoch and Miss Slade. He decided she was not a woman who liked to be thwarted.

Seymour finally spoke up. "Why not let Amy help? It would be better if you could hold off on letting Brackenreid in on the case until we ourselves know what's going on."

Besides, Amy will be a far sight better investigator than some of our constables."

Amy leaned over and gave him a quick peck on the cheek. "Thank you, Charlie. Well, Mr. Murdoch, will you consider it?"

"It's rather unorthodox."

She laughed in delight. "Unorthodoxy and I are close acquaintances, in case you haven't noticed."

Murdoch studied her face for a moment and she returned his regard steadily. There was something about her that reminded him of Liza, although he couldn't quite identify what it was. Physically they were quite different. Liza had been tall and of a dark complexion. Amy Slade had blue-grey eyes, fair hair, and was rather short.

"Well?" she asked.

"All right. I'll agree."

Reordan put a silver tray in the middle of the table and started to load the bowls and cups on to it.

"Isn't it time you told me what is going on?"

Amy looked at Murdoch. "Do you have the photographs with you?"

He nodded and took the envelope from his pocket.

"While you do that, I'll get some writing paper," said Seymour.

He left, and Amy drew Reordan into the chair beside her. "I found these four photographs in the desk of one of my pupils, young Agnes Fisher. They are offensive. Three are obscene, one is both blasphemous and obscene."

Murdoch was about to hand the envelope to Reordan when she stopped him. "I don't want you to show him the picture of the girl." She touched the Irishman's destroyed hand. "This is nothing to do with you, John. Both Mr. Murdoch and Charlie needed to see the picture if they were going to investigate, but I believe strongly that any viewing whatsoever participates in the wickedness." She searched for words. "We become carriers of the evil even if we

ourselves are not one of those who would take pleasure from such a sight. This photograph should be destroyed and will be as soon as we find the perpetrator. Do you understand what I mean, John?"

He shrugged. "Not really, but it doesn't matter. If you don't want me to see it, I won't."

She opened the envelope and took out the three cards. Reordan whistled through his teeth when he saw what was written on the back of the mourning card.

"And you believe your pupil wrote those words?"

"It is her hand."

"And who's the dead prince?"

Murdoch answered. "His name is Leonard Sims. He was found murdered this morning."

"You didn't do the in memoriam surely?"

"No. It looks as if the girl was the one who inked in the black borders."

"Which says she knew he was cooked?"

"Yes."

"Bad business."

Reordan picked up the Newly-wed card and seemed to freeze in his chair. To Murdoch's surprise, who thought the Irishman fairly worldly, he appeared shocked by what he saw. He stared at the picture for a moment, then held it up to the light.

"Who scratched out the faces?"

"Probably Agnes, er, my pupil, did," said Amy. "Mr. Murdoch says the ink appears to be the same as that used on the other two cards."

"Is the photograph you don't want me to see an obscene photograph of your pupil?"

"Yes, it is."

Reordan was visibly agitated. He virtually spat at Murdoch. "Do you know who the photographer is?"

"Yes and no. We have no concrete evidence, but I've got my sights on a studio on King Street called Gregory's

Emporium. It's close to both the school and Agnes's house. I'm guessing she wouldn't go too far afield. And I didn't like the proprietor at all. Slimy bastard. Oh, sorry, Miss Slade,"

"I'm not so delicate, Mr. Murdoch. My ears didn't fall off."

Reordan was studying the Newly-wed card intently and Murdoch could see it was making Amy uncomfortable.

"What did he look like, this Emporium cove?" he asked Murdoch.

"Short and stocky with reddish-brown hair cropped short. He's a cockney and likes to speak in what he called rhyming slang. You don't know him, do you?"

Reordan shoved the card away from him. "Of course not, why should I?" He eased himself to his feet. "Well, I've got washing up to do."

He limped over to the sink and Amy called after him.

"Are you all right, John?"

He didn't turn around but his voice was flat.

"Of course I'm all right. Why wouldn't I be?"

Murdoch found his reaction puzzling. He had been so eager to be involved in the case. What had happened? He was about to press the issue when Amy Slade gave a little warning shake of her head. Just then Seymour returned with paper, pens, and an inkwell.

"Here we go then."

Leaving the Irishman to his task, the three of them huddled around the table with the list in front of them and began to copy out the addresses. Murdoch took three, Seymour three, and Amy was given the two closest to home.

"What do you think, can we reconvene in about two hours, finished or not?" asked Murdoch.

Seymour and Amy agreed and Murdoch managed to hold back on his fussing about what Amy should do or not do. He left, calling out a goodnight to Reordan, who had reverted to his rude self and merely grunted a reply.

When Murdoch got outside, he realized he'd forgotten he'd told Enid he would come to her in the early evening for supper. Damn. He was going to be very late.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Murdoch had taken the names that were on the perimeter of the city limits. The first address was on Bloor Street not far from the Church of the Redeemer. However, when he got there, he found the house boarded up. When he inquired at the next-door neighbour's house, he was told that the family had left the city and returned to England.

"Too much sorrow here," said the neighbour, a plump young matron who had a child in her arms and one at her skirt.

The second address was at a large house on Lowther Avenue, and he had to walk there from the end of the Bloor streetcar line. A sweet-faced young maid left him on the doorstep while she went to see if her mistress was "at home." She was, and he was ushered into a drawing room crammed with furniture and, like the Smithers drawing room, lavishly decorated with black crepe and silk ribbons. The lady of the house was seated at the piano, sorting music, when Murdoch entered. She greeted him politely but her voice was enervated, as if she had no energy left for the world. He explained the reason for his visit and expressed his condolences, which she accepted graciously. She was expensively dressed in a black velvet gown that managed to

be a garb of mourning and fashionable as well, with its tight waist, full sleeves, and glitter of jet at the collar and cuffs. He had the sense she hadn't enjoyed the short taste of motherhood she had experienced. There were several framed photographs on the mantelpiece revealing a wife considerably younger than her husband. Yes, they had a photograph taken at her husband's insistence by their friend Mr. Notman. He didn't usually do mourning portraits but had agreed as a favour. At Murdoch's request, and after a search, she unearthed the photograph. It was quite unlike the one Amy had found, the baby was bigger and darker and was photographed lying in a crib sumptuously covered with satin. He thanked her and took his leave.

His last call took him to the north end of Yonge Street, to the home of Mr. and Mrs. James Hickey, who lived above a butcher's shop. There was no maid. Mr. Hickey answered the door and reluctantly allowed him in. His wife was seated on the sofa and he joined her there, sitting close, not altogether to give her comfort, Murdoch thought. He explained his mission again and once more offered condolences. Hickey told Murdoch angrily that no, they would never have a mourning photograph taken because their son was born with a cleft palate, among other deformities. He had died when he was six weeks old. The man seemed to be blaming his wife for delivering a defective product or perhaps his anger was masking dreadful grief and disappointment. The woman hardly spoke, simply sat red-eyed, her hands in her lap. Murdoch left as soon as he could.

He was more than happy to hear the clang of the streetcar coming up behind him as he reached Church Street. He jumped aboard, dropped his money into the conductor's tin box, and sat down, huddling into his coat. The heater at the rear of the streetcar was stoked high, and the mingled smell of coal and damp woollen coats permeated the air. When the conductor called out his stop,

Murdoch felt almost reluctant to leave the warmth of the streetcar.

Amy Slade answered his knock. "Oh do come in. You must be perished."

Murdoch tried to wipe the slush from his boots as best he could on the scraper and followed her inside. He suddenly felt shy and awkward, almost missing the hook on the coat stand as he hung up his coat. This time there was no appetizing smell coming from the kitchen and no light showed below Reordan's door.

"Where's the chef?"

"I don't know. He's gone out, which is very unusual for him." She smiled. "I thought we could meet in my room." She hesitated. "Charlie isn't back yet."

"Don't worry, Miss Slade. I won't tell anybody we've met alone in your private chamber."

He was attempting to make a joke, but it fell totally flat. She looked at him in surprise.

"That concern hadn't entered my mind."

They went upstairs, she leading and he studiously focusing on a spot between her shoulder blades. She had changed into her bloomer outfit again, the over tunic was cinched at the waist by a leather belt.

"In here," she said, and ushered him in.

He had expected either the same conventlike furnishings as the rest of the house or, influenced perhaps by the flowing bloomers, a room of drapery and plump cushions. This was neither. Amy had divided off her sleeping area by a tapestry screen and a double set of bookshelves crammed with books. The rest of the room was a sitting area, rather cramped because of the division but pleasant and colourful. Two brocade armchairs were in front of the fire, a dainty mahogany desk was against one wall, and there was a corner shelf unit where he glimpsed a collection

of china ornaments. The lamps were turned high and the fire was blazing.

“Here, take this chair. I can offer homemade hot ginger beer, can I pour you some?”

“I’d like that,” said Murdoch, not entirely sure if that was true. It was not a drink he’d had before.

She had a small hob on the fire and she removed the steaming kettle, poured the hot water into a jug, added the ginger beer from a bottle, stirred and poured it into a mug.

Murdoch drank some, found it rather stimulating and with a strong aftertaste.

“Very tasty,” he said in reply to her inquiring look. He put the mug on a small three-legged table and took out his notebook. “Why don’t we start while we’re waiting for Charlie. What did you find?”

“Not much, I’m afraid. Neither of the families that I visited could afford photographs. In that respect my help was not fruitful, but I must tell you, Mr. Murdoch, this has been one of the most harrowing experiences I have ever spent. In both cases, the state of the family, especially the mother, was so dire, I, a stranger, could offer them little comfort. The first child succumbed to influenza. They should not even have gone to the expense of publishing a memorial notice but it was a matter of pride. I stayed there for a long time as the mother had a great need to talk about what had happened. When I finally left, I went to the address on Queen Street, which turned out to be the home of a woman I have encountered when I have been shopping. The dead child was her fifth and, like the others, he lived for only two months.” She sipped on her own mug of ginger beer. “The poor woman cried out to me for some words of wisdom but I had none, trite or otherwise.”

Murdoch remembered how he’d felt when Liza died and how angry he became with the priest who tried to quote church doctrine on the mystery of God’s will.

"Sometimes sympathetic silence is the best comfort," he said.

"Perhaps."

They were silent, each in their own thoughts. Finally, Amy said, "Did you do any better with your investigation?"

"Not at all." He relayed to her what had happened. "Let us hope that Seymour did better."

At that moment, they heard the hall door open.

"That must be him," said Amy and she went to the door. "Charlie, we're up here."

Seymour came hurrying up the stairs and into the room.

"Will, good news. I've identified the baby in the picture."

"Well done. Who is it?"

Seymour handed his piece of paper to Murdoch. "They were my last visit, would you believe? They're a young couple and the babe was their first child, a boy. When I went into the parlour, I saw the photograph immediately. They've got it in a fancy silver frame on the mantelpiece. Their name is Dowdell, Geoffrey and Sophie, and the photographer they used was a woman, Miss Georgina Crofton. She lives on Gerrard Street."

"Did you ask the Dowdells if they knew Martha or Agnes Fisher?"

"Of course. They said they didn't. They can't afford to keep a regular servant. I also threw in the name of Leonard Sims, but nothing there either. Here's their address. The other two people on my list had not had pictures taken."

Suddenly, Murdoch couldn't help himself and he had to stifle a yawn. He stood up.

"It's too late to call on Miss Crofton tonight. I'll go first thing in the morning."

"I hope it leads somewhere," said Amy.

"So do I. I'm sorry we're not making faster progress."

She met his eyes. "Do you think Agnes has come to harm?"

"I don't know."

He wished he could say he was certain the girl was safe but he couldn't, and there was something about Amy Slade that precluded platitudes. She looked so pale and tired, his heart went out to her. "If I may say so, Miss Slade, I think you should retire for the night. You have been most helpful."

"What shall I do now?" asked Seymour.

Murdoch fished in his pocket and took out the list he'd made of photographic studios.

"You can start checking on these tomorrow. I'll join up with you as soon as I can."

"John seems to have deserted us," Amy said to Seymour. "I'm worried about him. He was acting so strangely when he saw the photographs."

Seymour shrugged. "He gets that way sometimes. You don't always know what will set him off. And they weren't the easiest pictures to look at. I've known him vanish for one or two days at a time. It's as if his memories press in upon him and all he can do is move like a homeless dog."

Murdoch offered his hand to the schoolteacher. "Thank you again, Miss Slade."

She smiled at him rather mischievously. "You seem in a hurry to leave, Mr. Murdoch. Don't tell me you have another duty to perform."

He could feel himself blush. "Not a duty, ma'am, but a prior engagement. And I'm terribly late as it is."

"I hope your friend will forgive you."

"So do I."

"You will keep us informed of your progress, won't you?" Amy asked.

For a split second, Murdoch wasn't sure what she was referring to.

"Yes, of course. Good night to both of you. No, don't worry, Miss Slade, I can let myself out."

He left them, aware that Amy was gazing after him.

CHAPTER THIRTY

It was past ten o'clock by the time Murdoch arrived at Enid's lodgings. He almost expected her to have gone to bed, but there was a light showing at her window. Having no desire to rouse Mrs. Barrett at this hour, he made a snowball and threw it at the window. Immediately, the curtain was pushed aside and Enid waved at him, mimed to him to be quiet, and disappeared to open the front door.

Neither spoke as he entered the house and Enid's welcome was decidedly on the cool side. He went to kiss her, but she avoided him with more warning mimes. Murdoch felt a stab of guilt as it was obvious Enid had been anticipating his arrival for a long time.

She closed the door to her sitting room behind them with a little snap.

"I was worried, Will. I expected you at five o'clock."

He didn't remember specifying a particular time but certainly ten o'clock was well past arrival time.

"I'm sorry, I've been working on a case and I had to trudge all over the city to do my interviews. Is Alwyn asleep?"

"Most certainly, he is. He tried to stay up as late as eight o'clock to see you, but he couldn't."

Another little piece of fiery coal on his head. Murdoch thought Enid had got the matter of reproaches down to a fine art.

"I'm sorry," he repeated.

They were keeping their voices low, which made it difficult to have a flaming row although Murdoch felt that's what Enid wanted.

"Would you like a cup of tea?" she asked with excessive politeness. "You must be cold and hungry."

Coward that he was, Murdoch didn't feel like explaining he was still full of pig's feet stew so he just shook his head.

"I'm not hungry, but tea would be nice, thank you."

Enid went to the fireplace to fetch the kettle. While she was making the tea, trying to create a distraction to ease the tension and also because he needed her help, Murdoch took his notebook from his inner pocket.

"Enid, I've solved that issue of the anonymous letters. Sergeant Seymour is involved with a labour organization, which he's not allowed to be, and the letter writer knows about it. I don't want Charlie to lose his job, so I've decided to see if I can scare off the fellow. Will you type something for me?"

"Surely you don't mean tonight? I might wake Mrs. Barrett."

"I doubt that. Isn't this the evening she spends with her sister?"

Enid blushed fiercely at being caught in her little lie, and Murdoch thought he'd made matters worse by tripping her up like that. He reached over and pulled her gently into his arms.

"Please don't punish me, Mrs. Jones. I am so happy to see you and if there had been any way of informing you I would be late, I would have done so."

She leaned against him stiffly, not yet ready to yield, but he didn't let go, nuzzling his chin against her hair. Finally

she turned her head and looked into his face. He was surprised to see she had tears in her eyes.

“Oh, William, I wish it could have been otherwise.”

He knew she didn't mean just the tardiness of his visit but there was nothing he could say. If he made her a proposal of marriage, she would have to return to Wales first and even though with her in his arms he was hot with desire, he knew that he could not pretend a depth of feeling he didn't have. Again he was twisted with guilt, and he kissed her urgently to compensate. She responded slowly at first but more and more passionately. Finally she was the one who broke off the embrace. The brightness in her eyes was unbearable and he reached for her again but she caught his arms.

“Alwyn is fast asleep. If we stay here he is less likely to hear us.”

She went to the door, turned the key in the lock, and practically ran back to him. He drew her to the hearth and they lay down on the rug. A bed would have been more comfortable but at that moment Murdoch would have been happy to lie on bricks.

Because of the urgency in both of them, the connection was over rather more quickly than he wanted but they nevertheless lay for a while on the rug, until, arm aching, he levered himself into a sitting position. She stayed there with her head on the cushion he had pulled down when they started. He'd loosened her hair and it hung untidily about her face. She was flushed and he saw that her cheek was reddened from rubbing against the roughness of his chin. She smiled up at him.

“Did you say you had some work you wanted me to do?”

They both laughed, which led to more kisses.

Finally, he leaned back and grabbed his notebook.

“I wrote it out.”

She yawned and, pulling on her robe, got to her feet and went over to the typewriter. She sat down, inserted a clean sheet of paper in the machine.

“I’m ready, sir.”

He placed the notebook where she could see it. She read through what he’d written and glanced over her shoulder at him in surprise.

“Goodness me, is this true?”

He shrugged. “It could be.”

“Is it addressed to anybody in particular?”

“Inspector Brackenreid.”

She grinned. “I see. What’s sauce for the goose is good for the gander.”

“Precisely.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

In spite of the improved feelings between them, Murdoch didn't stay at Enid's much past midnight. A rug on the floor was hardly conducive to a good night's sleep. He slipped away into the quiet streets. The lamps had been extinguished, but the snow reflected light enough to see by. He trudged past the darkened houses, where an occasional lamp revealed a late bedtime.

When he entered his house, he paused as he always did to listen to sounds coming from Mr. and Mrs. Kitchen's quarters. All was quiet, and Murdoch hoped Arthur was having a rare peaceful night. The first shock of their announcement had subsided, and Murdoch wished fervently the move to the fresh country air of Muskoka would bring Arthur health.

Once in his room, he undressed quickly. The fire Mrs. Kitchen always built for him had died to glowing embers and the chill of the winter night had seeped in. Shivering, he jumped into bed, wishing not for the first time there was a warm body waiting for him to lie next to. And again, he cursed himself for not insisting on marrying Liza sooner. He had never experienced her undressed body pressed against his and the regret of that tormented him. He thumped his

pillow, rolled on his side, and deliberately tried to wrench his thoughts away from the past and back to Enid and her generous embrace.

He closed his eyes and immediately felt sleep slip away. Damn. He knew what that signified. He tried to lie still but he couldn't, and the tossing and turning began. He sat up to check the alarm clock on his dresser. It was already two o'clock. He thumped the feathers in his pillow and buried his face in it. Arthur Kitchen had once told him that the best cure of insomnia was loving conjugal connections but clearly that wasn't proving true. He'd just had loving connections and he was still wide awake. Arthur may have advised love for insomnia, but Father Fair, the priest at St. Paul's, on the other hand, said the best cause of a good night's sleep was a pure conscience. Murdoch decided that what was keeping him awake was guilt. He sat up again, trying to decide if it was worth it to light a pipe. It was. He reached for his Powhatan, stuffed it with tobacco, lit it, and drew deeply on the stem. What the hell was the matter with him? He'd never describe himself as a randy tomcat, but he did seem to be having divided feelings yet again among three women; one was deceased to be sure but the other two weren't. And to one of those, he had made promises of the flesh that he didn't think he could keep. The shadow of Liza was present at the best of times when he was with Enid, but now someone else had come into the picture. He couldn't get thoughts of Amy Slade out of his mind.

"And it's not just the pantaloons," he said aloud, punctuating his words with a puff of his pipe. What then? She was pretty enough, but he'd encountered women who were as attractive and he had hardly given them a second thought. Well, to be honest, maybe a second or even a third thought, but nothing like this. He'd just come from intimacy with Enid and like a sly fox his fantasies had slipped away to Miss Slade and the notion of kissing that full mouth. No, that wasn't accurate either. Yes, he would like to hold and kiss

her, he wouldn't deny that, but there was something else netting his thoughts. He wanted her good opinion. He wanted her to smile that bright smile at him. He wanted those cool grey eyes to look into his with admiration. Murdoch groaned and puffed away some more. What was he, a green boy mooning over the first girl he'd met? He couldn't remember ever feeling like this about Liza. Their love had been immediate and reciprocal and he'd never doubted that she was his only and complete love. But was he deluding himself? What if she'd lived and they married and then he found himself hankering after somebody else? Was that the kind of man he was? Wanting what he couldn't have, then losing interest when it was his? Why didn't he want to marry Enid Jones, a woman he had been pining after for months?

He realized he was biting so hard on the stem of his pipe he was in danger of snapping it off. His and Enid's difference in religion was a big obstacle but not insurmountable, and he was aware that she had been engaging him less and less in doctrinal discussions lately. If she converted to Catholicism, any priest would agree to the union. Mixed marriages were not unheard of. No, he couldn't make that an excuse. There were other reasons floating at the back of his mind as to why he couldn't marry her. What the hell were they? Was he a man incapable of monogamy? He had become engaged to Liza only a few months after they had met and until she died of the typhoid seven months later, he could honestly say he had not been concerned about any other woman he'd encountered no matter how attractive she had been. But that faithfulness had not been put to the test of time. Would it have lasted? There was no answer to that of course except self-knowledge and at this moment he felt a stranger to himself, doubting everything.

Damn, damn. He put his pipe down and swung his legs out of bed. Above the headboard hung a brass crucifix, so

familiar he hardly noticed it any more. Now in the dim light, he thought Christ was looking down on him in disappointment. He padded over to his dresser and for the first time in a long while, he took out his rosary. He threaded the beads through his fingers. The wooden beads were smooth and cool to his touch. His mother had given him the rosary when he was six years old on the occasion of his first communion. The crucifix and chain were of silver, the beads olive wood and he knew she had scrimped for months to save enough money to pay for it. He smiled to himself. He had secretly hoped to receive a bag of marbles even though he knew a rosary was the typical gift. Poor Mamma. He never thought about her without pity and the old stirring of anger that she had died so miserably.

He went to the foot of the bed and dropped to his knees. His inclination was to say the Sorrowful Mysteries, but he thought he'd be better served tonight by acclaiming the Glorious Mysteries. He held the silver crucifix and murmured, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven..."

He continued, the rosary a path of prayer that he followed. At the end of the second *decade*, he stopped. What was the point of repeating prayers that seemed empty to him? He was not connecting with God's presence. Unbidden, memories jumped into his mind: of saying the rosary in the evenings with his mother and Susanna, Bertie joining in with shouts of Happy Christmas, no matter what the season. Harry, his father, was never a part of these sessions, and so the telling of the beads was a moment of happiness, more like a game really, especially when he was younger and he was learning to recite the prayers perfectly. His mother had always been so pleased when he got it right. Susanna soon overtook him though and nothing could match her fervency and accuracy. *Poor Cissie*. All his family had gone now except for Harry, and Murdoch doubted he would ever in his lifetime have fond feelings for his father.

He fingered the small medallion on the rosary, a depiction of Christ holding out his arms to a child. Murdoch thought about Agnes. The priest had told Murdoch at one of his infrequent confessions that he was becoming too worldly and not contemplating the workings of heaven, but he felt powerless to stop the drift away from his faith. Faced daily with Arthur Kitchen's slow and painful death Murdoch had asked, Where is God's will in this? Priests didn't like questions like that and he'd been sent packing with a heavy penance to perform.

He got to his feet, stiff from the cold hard floor, and returned the rosary to its velvet bag in the drawer. He heard Arthur cough downstairs and the murmur of Mrs. Kitchen's voice as she ministered to him. So much for Arthur's peaceful night.

Murdoch climbed back into bed, rubbing his feet together to warm them. Perhaps it was a blessing that Enid was called back to Wales. He knew he could never be with a woman if he had any doubts at all. It was a dishonourable thing to do. But then what? Would he start to court Miss Slade? He grinned in the darkness. He didn't know what her religious beliefs were, but they weren't likely to be anything conventional. And that thought was quite reassuring.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

She was in a house crowded with people. They were on shelves along each wall and all of them were dying. They were coughing and crying, calling for water. It was bitterly cold and right through the centre of the room there was a river, filthy and black and moving fast. She was searching for little Patrick, and even above the din she could hear him calling to her from the next room. She walked beside the rushing water, knowing that one false step and she would fall in. She was trying to move as fast as she could, but her limbs were so heavy and cold she could hardly put one foot in front of the other. Then she was at the door. All she had to do was go through and she would be able to get Patrick and they would be safe. But a man was there, sitting on a high stool. He had a stick that he thrust out in front of her. She tried to tell him that she needed to go through to her child, but no words would come out of her mouth. The man paid no attention but began to push her backwards with the stick. She could see the pleasure this gave him. She couldn't fight him and felt herself falling into the icy river. The foul water flowed up her nostrils and into her mouth and she thought she was going to choke on the stench of it.

Mrs. Crofton's cries brought Georgina running into the room.

"Hush now, hush. It's all right. I'm here, hush."

Mrs. Crofton was gasping for air, her hands clawing at her throat as if she were drowning.

"Ruby, dearest, fetch a damp cloth," Ruby had been asleep on a cot at the foot of the bed and she got up hurriedly and went to the washstand. Georgina stroked her mother's face, uttering soothing noises as she did so.

"Here, ma'am," said Ruby and she handed her a wet towel, which Georgina placed on the back of her mother's neck. Mrs. Crofton shuddered and tried to shrug it away but her daughter held it on firmly.

"It'll feel better in a moment, Mama. Ruby, light the candle if you please."

Slowly, Mrs. Crofton was becoming calmer but her open eyes were wild, the pupils dilated.

"Lie back for a moment, my dear," said her daughter and she plumped up the cushion for her mother's head. "There, that's better. Good pet. See, we're here. Your own little Ruby and me."

Unmasked, Ruby reached for a glass of water that was on the small table beside the bed and offered it to her mistress, who took a small sip.

Georgina tucked a strand of grey hair under her mother's night cap. Her touch was tender.

"You were having one of your bad dreams, my pet, but it's all right now. See, you're in your own pretty bedroom that you furnished yourself. Look around. There's your bureau and your little stool that Mrs. Buchanan embroidered, just as they are."

Mrs. Crofton caught her hand. "Oh Georgina, I had a terrible vision."

"It was just a dream, Mama..."

"No-not a dream, a vision. I must tell it."

"Of course, my dear. But first why don't I send Ruby to make a hot posset. We can all use one, I'm sure."

"No! It was one of my visions, not like the other dreams. I can tell the difference. I must say it now."

Georgina stared at her. "Tell it to us then."

"There was so much suffering and I could do nothing. I knew I would be able to save little Patrick but a man prevented me. Oh such a wicked man." She sobbed, still in the dreamworld. "I was crying out for help, but no matter how hard I screamed no sound was coming from my throat." Georgina signalled to Ruby to give her the glass of water and she drank greedily.

"Thank you, dearest girl. Did I call out?"

"Yes, ma'am, you did."

"It was a vision. You must write it down, Georgina, you must write it down before it leaves me."

"Very well, Mama. Ruby, will you be so good as to bring me pen and ink and some notebook from the escritoire."

Ruby hurried to obey and Mrs. Crofton leaned back on her pillow while her daughter took a seat beside the bed, ready to take down what she said. As soon as she began to relate the details of her dream, Mrs. Crofton became distressed again and her Irish lilt was more pronounced.

"The foul water was up my nostrils and in my mouth so I thought I was going to choke on the stench of it."

"Breathe in for a moment, Mama," said Georgina soothingly. "See, there is no stench here. There is only the pleasant lavender cologne that Mrs. Buchanan sprinkles on the sheets and perhaps Ruby has the smell of baking bread in her hair."

Mrs. Crofton was not to be consoled.

"You know whenever little Patrick appears to me in a dream it is a warning that we will hear of a death within the week. Don't you remember, last summer, he came to me and we heard that your uncle Callum had died? Surely you remember me telling you my dream?"

“Of course I do, my pet, but Uncle Callum was very ill. His death was not unexpected.”

Mrs. Crofton ignored her. “This dream is a warning to us, Georgina.”

“If this is a warning, my pet, what should we take from it?”

“Somebody is in grave danger. Death is approaching. Kiss me, my dear one. And you too, Ruby. Oh kiss me so I know that you are quick and not dead.”

Dutifully, her daughter did so and Ruby managed a timid peck on her mistress’s cold hand.

“Oh it was dreadful. Such fear and sorrow coming from your poor dead brother and I could not help him and I knew that stinking river would take me.”

“The people on shelves sound like the passengers in their bunks,” said Georgina. “And the stinking river running through the room is the bilge of the ship. You are dreaming of the crossing again.”

“Oh Gina, don’t make fun of me.”

“I’m not at all, Mama, but we know how terrible the voyage here was. How many times have you dreamed of it? More than we can count.”

Mrs. Crofton was almost weeping. “No matter that it has the look of my memory, this was a premonition. It must be respected. That man in my dream was as wicked as the devil himself. He was evil, I tell you. I could see his delight as he forced me into the river. He was enjoying my suffering and that he had the power to keep me from my poor little boy. He was happy others were in such need and he was not.”

“That sounds very like any one of the English peers who let our people starve,” said Georgina.

Her mother shuddered. “It is true. There was the same cold indifference and I, alas, I was as helpless as I was then.”

Ruby moved closer to Georgina and they were quiet for a moment, watching Mrs. Crofton as she looked into the horror that never left her. She said with great weariness, "This is no mere dream. I have not lost the true gift, the sight. We are being sent a warning of tragedy. There is danger all around us and wickedness. We must beware."

"And we will be, Mama."

Georgina looked over at Ruby, who was pale and wide-eyed. "Remember how Mama was telling you last month about the Great Hunger when the potato blight destroyed the harvest?"

Ruby managed to nod.

"Her nightmares still visit her, alas."

Mrs. Crofton had closed her eyes and already seemed to be drifting off to sleep. Georgina put the ink pot, pen, and paper on the side table. She said softly to Ruby, "The entire village where Mama lived was starving to death. Her own family was decimated. The landlord finally paid their passage to Canada. No, child, this was not an act of kindness. He wanted to get rid of them so he could claim their paltry sliver of land. There were others in the same plight, of course, and the boats were so overcrowded it is a wonder they could sail at all."

Mrs. Crofton moved her head restlessly and Georgina waited until she settled down. Ruby was hardly breathing and even though her bare feet were icy cold by now, she dared not move. She wanted Miss Georgina to continue with her tale because she loved to be spoken to in that special way, but she could hardly believe that her mistress had suffered from the same poverty that she herself understood all too well.

Georgina sat back in the chair. "Mama was the only remaining child, and her father, my dear grandfather, died before they even got to the port. Her mother had no choice but to continue. The conditions on board the ship were

almost too terrible for us to contemplate. The ship owners took on as many passengers as they could for the money..."

Ruby couldn't bear it and she burst out. "But the captains, ma'am. Didn't they refuse? Captains are the kings of their ships, you told me so yourself."

Georgina sighed. "Perhaps one did, perhaps even two, but we have no record of them. All we know is that many, many people died on the journey over. Typhoid fever swept through the hold where the poorest people had been crammed and stuffed like so much baggage. There was no one to take care of the sick and the dying and Mama's mother, my dear grandmother, died. For two days, Ruby, for two long days, nobody came down to tend to those who were ill. Mama, who was a mere child, much younger than you are now, was forced to lie beside the corpse of her own mother."

Ruby was trembling, as much with fear and cold as with sorrow, but she whispered, "Oh Miss Georgina, I am dreadful sorry to hear it."

"Fortunately for her, another family, who had lost their only child, took her in. They prospered when they came to Toronto, which was why Mama was able to make such a good match when she grew up." She smiled at the girl. "But I am giving you such a long face. That part of the story is a happy one and I shall tell it to you another day. You looked perished, you poor little mite." She lifted the quilt. "Why don't you get into Mama's bed. It will keep you both warm. I'm going to stir up the fire and sit in the armchair for a while. She's be right as rain in the morning, you'll see."

Ruby did as she was told. Mrs. Crofton's body was warm under the covers and soft. The older woman stirred for a moment and pulled her close, whispering drowsily, "What would we do without our precious jewel, Georgina? What a comfort she is."

Georgina blew out the candle and went to the big armchair by the fire. It wasn't long before Ruby heard her

light snore. Mrs. Crofton's breathing deepened and she knew that they were both sound asleep.

She lay watching the shadows of the flames flicker on the wall until the fire died down. The feather pillow smelled faintly of the lavender water that Mrs. Buchanan sprinkled on the pillowcase when she was doing the ironing. Mrs. Crofton was lying against her and her breath was on her neck. Ruby cautiously touched the silk of her mistress's nightgown.

She had a good idea why Mrs. Crofton had dreamed what she had. She had met that evil man who took pleasure in others' suffering. Ruby covered her ears with her hands as if she were blocking out cries. No matter what happened, she would never give up this sanctuary she had found. There was nothing she could do.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Ralph Tibbett stroked his wife's breast, swollen with milk, the nipple dark. Kate was half asleep but instinctively shifted to make herself more available. As if sensing the movement, the smaller twin woke up, snuffled, then started to wail.

"Leave him," whispered Ralph into Kate's neck. But the brother was disturbed and he woke too.

"I've got to see to them," said Kate and she rolled away.

Ralph caught her arm. "Let them cry. They'll fall asleep in a minute."

Kate hesitated, reaching down to rock the cradle beside the bed. Her nipples were already oozing milk in response to the infants and both babies smelled it, making jerking movements with their arms as if they would get right out of the cradle and grab hold of her.

"I'll feed them first."

She sat up in the bed, pulled the pillow onto her lap, and picked up Jacob, who immediately stopped crying. She laid him on the pillow so he could latch on to her right breast and took the other infant, James, out of the cradle and placed him at the left breast.

Ralph was propped on his elbow, watching. "You spoil them," he said.

Kate tried to smile at him although she quailed at the disapproval in his voice. "Ma always said there's no use in letting a babe cry itself into a fit. They're much happier if they know I'm here."

"And your husband would be much happier if he had a wife he could count on."

"I'm sorry, Ralph. I can't help it."

"Can't you? I don't know about that."

"It's true. I was so sore at first and then...I don't get much sleep." She glanced over at him with a sudden uncharacteristic resentment. "You aren't here when it's the worst."

"Thank goodness for that."

He swung his legs over the side of the bed. "I said I'd be in to work early anyway. Did you wash my shirt?"

"Yes, it's in the wardrobe."

He got up and padded across the floor. "It's bloody cold in here."

"We're almost out of coal. You said you'd bring a bucketful in last night."

The twins were slowing down on the suckling, their cheeks flushed with pleasure and exertion. Kate watched her husband as he dressed. He'd got fatter since they'd married. The handsome young lad she had fallen so wildly in love with seemed to be vanishing daily. But she was filled with yearning.

"Ralph, can you stay a bit longer? I get so lonesome when you're not here."

"Do you? You have the babies, how can you be lonesome?" His tone was mocking. "Don't tell me you don't love those little ones. I thought they were your heart's delight."

"They are, of course they are, but sometimes I am so tired and I have just fallen asleep when one or the other

wakes up. And then I could scream, Ralph. I feel so bad about that but I can't help myself. I do love them so much but I think if I could just have a rest, I'd feel better. That's not wicked, is it? If you could only mind them for me for just a few hours, sometimes. Please, Ralph. They're your children too."

"Are they? I hope so."

He was standing in front of the washstand fastening his silk cravat. He watched her in the mirror. "Oh don't fret so, Kate. You know I'm just trying to get some extra money for us. That's why I work so much."

"That's a new tie, isn't it? We could buy two buckets of coal for what you spent on that."

She'd never challenged him before, and they were both momentarily surprised at her outburst. Ralph picked up a jar of pomade and applied a good helping to his hair. "It is new to me but not new bought. You know how important it is that I look up to scratch. He gave it to me."

He had no need to say who "he" referred to. His employer was a real go-getter, as Ralph described him. Kate was growing to hate this man she'd never met because of the unpredictable and, to her mind, often unjustified demands he put on Ralph's time. Ralph was vague about his duties, which he said varied but were generally in the realm of helping customers. He was just as vague about his weekly wage. Unfortunately, his job as night watchman at the Brewery was also unpredictable, sometimes he was called in and sometimes he wasn't. And he'd made her swear not to reveal to anybody that he was employed there. He was embarrassed at having to do such a menial job, a far cry from the glamour of the office and the swell clients. He only did it so he could provide for his family, he said, but Kate, in her rare honest moments, had to admit she seldom saw the extra money.

Kate placed Jacob back in his cradle. James snuffled but then relapsed into sleep as well and she put him in the other

end.

"Can you come back to bed now, Ralph?"

"Don't be silly, Kate. I'm dressed. It's too late." He came over to the bed and gave her a kiss on the cheek. "Look, I promise I'll bring home some coal or at least the money to buy some."

"When will you be home?"

"Late, I'm afraid. We have an important client coming in from Hamilton and I have to be on my toes. I'll be needed." He took a dollar out of his pocket and put it on the dresser. "Here. Get Ben to fetch more coal for you."

Kate got out of bed. "He'll be going to school in a minute. You'd better ask him now."

"All right, I will. Bye, Kate, no need to fret. Things are looking up for us."

She didn't trust herself to answer.

Ralph went into the hall just as Ben was coming down the stairs.

"Morning to you, lad. Off to school, are you?"

The boy nodded. He was muffled in a long ratty-looking scarf but he had no gloves or hat and bare leg was visible between the top of his boots and his too-short trousers.

"Tell you what. I'm going in that direction. I'll walk a ways with you."

Ralph led the way outside, pulling his soft lamb's wool muffler around his chin. His gloves were fur-lined pig skin. They walked on for a bit, then Ralph said, "Where's your sister? I haven't seen her recently. Not ill, is she?"

"She's staying with Martha."

"And where would that be?"

"I don't know, sir. She's never told us."

A gust of cold wind made Ralph jam his astrakhan hat more tightly on his head. Ben tried to wrap the thin muffler around his face. Ralph tapped him on the shoulder.

"If you don't mind me saying, young fellow, you could do with some warm clothes."

Ben didn't answer.

"Tell you what," continued Ralph. "How would you like a job? No, I'm speaking God's truth. Why don't you come along with me? It don't matter if you're a bit late for school. We'll think up a good excuse."

The boy looked at him doubtfully.

"What sort of job?"

Ralph beamed down at him. "Well, I work for this real toff, you see. It's very well-paid work."

"What do you do?"

"I'm a sort of jack of all trades. Somebody needs meeting at the train station, I'm there. Need a good-looking sort of fellow, I'm your man. Very varied kind of job. But you know he's so busy these days that he said to me the other day, he said, 'Ralph, I could do with a bit of extra help. Do you know of any lad might be willing to run errands a few times a week?' So I thought to myself, 'By Jove, I do know a lad who might be willing to make himself a bit of dash.' And you're the lad I have in mind, Ben."

Another pause. They were almost at the corner of Sydenham and Sackville, where the boy had to turn for school.

"Is it against the law what he wants me to do?"

Ralph clapped him on the shoulder and burst out laughing. "What a bright lad you are, Ben, I knew it. No flies on you. But no, of course, it ain't against the law. I wouldn't ask you to do anything that'd get you into trouble. But I wager this job would bring you enough for a hat and some gloves. And if you do it properly and prove you are a reliable lad, there might be more work and you can get some socks and new boots. Those you've got on wouldn't look good on a stiff."

At the corner where he would normally turn to go to school, Ben halted.

"All right," he said.

“That’s my lad,” said Ralph and he rubbed the boy’s shorn head. “It’s a bit of a walk but it’ll do us good. Get some colour into those pale cheeks of yours.” He took Ben’s arm. “Heigh ho, now let’s think of what we will tell your teacher.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

Night and morning hadn't quite changed places, the station lamps were fully lit, and Murdoch experienced his usual tug of pleasure at the sight. From the beginning, when he was merely a constable, he had loved the job despite the dull hours of walking the beat. He liked being in a world that was both outside of society and paradoxically at its very heart. He couldn't imagine doing anything else. This was why he could understand Seymour's being so disturbed by the malicious anonymous letters. He and the sergeant shared the same loyalty to their work and colleagues. And he was about to put that loyalty into operation.

This early in the day, the main hall of the station was empty of any miscreants shifting their rear ends on the polished bench. The stove was hot, and the smell of burning coal mingled with the lingering sour odours of fear and poverty. Fresh sawdust on the floor was needed by the look of it. The duty sergeant, Gardiner, was sitting behind the high charge desk, writing in the day book.

"Hello, Will. Don't tell me you've been ill too. We didn't see you yesterday."

"I've been working, sergeant, don't worry."

"I'm not worried. It's just that we're short-handed with Seymour off sick. I wondered if it was something catching that was going around."

"Could be. You'd better wear your flannels."

Murdoch hung up his hat and coat and strolled over to the desk where Callahan was pecking at the typewriter. He slapped him on the back.

"Come on, Liam. You can't have lost your skill overnight. Or did you get a mote in your eye?"

Callahan's fair skin flushed making his freckles vanish. "No, I was just being careful."

"Good idea. But probably unnecessary considering how well you performed in the competition."

Gardiner, who loved a good gossip, overheard as he was meant to.

"What competition you talking about? Shiniest boots?"

"Our young constable here is an expert typewriter. You got a fourth place, didn't you, Liam?"

Callahan nodded. Gardiner laughed. "I can see why he's keeping his light under a bushel. You know how things are in here. He'd never get out from that desk if the inspector thinks he's a prize."

"That is for certain. He likes his trophies," said Murdoch. "But I didn't know you were hungering to be out on the beat, Liam."

Callahan flashed his boyish smile. "It's more interesting than sitting here all day."

"Tell him the truth, Will. In winter, you get frostbite and in summer you bake like bread in an oven but you don't smell as good. Why he'd want to leave this cushy job, I can't fathom."

Murdoch spoke to the sergeant. "Too bad there's no position open. Especially now that the city council has turned down the chief's request for more money." He grinned down at Callahan. "Sorry, lad. Typewriting it is. No

advancement for you. Maybe you could train as a Bertillon clerk."

"No, thank you, sir. I'm quite happy doing what I'm doing."

"Are you then? I'm glad to hear it." Murdoch reached in his pocket for his notebook. "Speaking of Bertillon, I'd like you to telephone headquarters for me. I've got some measurements on somebody I'd like them to check. We've even got a name, so that should make their job easier."

The Bertillon system the police force used was notoriously difficult to learn and required a skilful and trained clerk.

At that moment, an elderly woman came into the hall. She was neatly dressed in a black bonnet, a brown fur caperine, and black serge skirt. A widow for some years by the look of her. She sent directly to the sergeant.

"I have lost my purse, it may have been stolen from my pocket."

Gardiner tut-tutted sympathetically. "Let me get the details down, ma'am. We'll get it back for you."

Murdoch tore the page of notes from his notebook and gave it to Callahan. "Tell them it's urgent, will you." He glanced over his shoulder at Gardiner, who was studiously writing down what the woman was telling him.

"By the way, Liam, this letter was inside the door. I picked it up." He took another envelope from his pocket. "You deal with the post so I thought you'd better have it."

Callahan took the envelope curiously.

"I noticed it was addressed to the inspector," continued Murdoch, "but it's odd that somebody just dropped it off like that, don't you think? He told me he'd been receiving some complaining letters lately. Maybe it's one of them."

"Right." Callahan put the envelope in a tray on his desk. "I'll take it up later."

The sergeant was still busy with the widow who was deaf and both their voices were raised as she described at

length where she was when she missed her purse. Murdoch bent close to Callahan's ear.

"You know what, young Liam, I saw that the envelope wasn't sealed. It might be better for our inspector's frame of mind if he wasn't troubled by silly nuisance notes at this time. Why don't we have a look at what that letter is all about? I take responsibility. If we think it's worth while, we'll pass it on to him; if it's a load of horse plop, we won't bother him with it. He's already had three letters that really bothered him, I know that for a fact."

Callahan began to look afraid. He knew what Murdoch was getting at but wasn't ready to crumble just yet. He didn't move and Murdoch picked up the envelope.

"Why don't I open it and you can be completely innocent of all wrongdoing, if it is wrongdoing, which I doubt."

He removed the letter from the envelope, turned so that his body shielded them from Gardiner. Fortunately, the widow was garrulous.

Murdoch held the paper in front of Callahan. "My, my, it's a good thing Brackenreid hasn't seen this."

To Inspector Brackenreid. What is this station coming to? You harbour a viper in your bosom in the presence of constable, second class, Liam Callahan. This is what he does in his spare time. He is planning to send it to the newspapers. You will be a laughing stock, sir.
A well wisher.

On a separate sheet of paper Murdoch had drawn a picture of the inspector, with his bald head and bushy sideburns, slumped at his desk, clutching a bottle of whisky. A caption came from his mouth: "Don't bother me, I'm working." If he said so himself, Murdoch thought it was a

good likeness and he'd inked the nose with the red of a serious toper. He almost felt sorry for Callahan, who gasped in horror. "I never did that."

Murdoch grimaced. "That's the problem with letters like this. There's no way to prove they're not true. You say you're innocent, but who'll believe you? When the dirt flies, somebody's going to smell."

"But why would I do anything like that? I have no reason."

"Liam, I believe you but I don't know if anybody else will. Miss Gripe is loyal though, isn't she. She won't mind if you lose your position. She'll stick by you."

Callahan looked at him directly. The pretence dropped. He knew what Murdoch was doing. He almost snarled, the fresh-faced youth vanished.

"What shall I do?"

Murdoch folded the letter and drawing and replaced them in the envelope he put in his pocket.

"I'll help you even if thousands wouldn't. Type the following letter. Quick, before Gardiner hears us...Dear Inspector Brackenreid. Regarding the matter of Sergeant Seymour. I am happy to inform you that I completely retract my former accusations which were based on error and mistaken identity. He is a fine officer and you need have no concern for his conduct at any time. You have my guarantee I will let the matter drop completely."

Callahan was in his best form and typed as quickly as Murdoch was speaking. Silently he rolled the paper from his typewriter and handed it to Murdoch, who put it in an envelope he had brought with him.

"I'll deliver it to his office right away."

The constable was staring straight ahead but Murdoch could feel his hatred. He squeezed his shoulder hard.

"It's reassuring to know that the matter is settled and there will be no more anonymous letters to distress the

inspector.” He tapped his pocket. “We don’t want him to see this, do we? Ever.”

Gardiner was escorting the old lady to the door.

“What have you two been doing? Didn’t I hear you clacking away like a train, Liam? That was very good.”

“Constable Callahan was obliging me in a personal matter,” said Murdoch.

“You shouldn’t be doing that on police time.”

“Don’t worry, it won’t happen again.” He took his hat from the peg and held out the new envelope. “Gardiner, this letter is for Inspector Brackenreid. Will you see that he gets it. Don’t worry, I think he’ll be very happy to receive it.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Georgina Crofton's house was on Gerrard Street, facing onto the Horticultural Gardens. In good weather, the Gardens were a popular gathering place, dapper mashers in their straw hats strolled the paths covertly eyeing the nursemaids wheeling perambulators or the servant girls and seamstresses on their days off chattering together on the benches, also covertly eyeing the dandies. But on this bleak January morning the park was deserted.

The house was large and elegant, built of pale buff-coloured brick with a green door and window trim. The front steps curved to the door and the path was paved with slate. It was possible Miss Crofton made a good living from her work, but Murdoch thought the look of the house more suggested long entrenched wealth. He tugged on the bell and while he was waiting for the door to open, he banged the muddy snow off his boots. He was just about to pull more heartily on the bell when the door was opened by an elderly woman in the plain navy dress of a housekeeper.

"Yes?"

The woman's tone was supercilious, her expression disdainful. Murdoch had encountered the snobbishness of

servants many times before but it still irritated him. He handed her his card.

“Good morning, ma’am. I’m Acting Detective Murdoch and I would like to speak to Miss Georgina Crofton.”

He expected more disdain but her reaction was the opposite. She looked alarmed.

“Oh dear, so there are thieves in the neighbourhood. We feared as much. Come in, please. Miss Georgina is in her studio. I’ll get her at once.” She started off down the hall, then turned back to him.

“Shall I fetch Mrs. Crofton as well? She is in her chambers.”

That sounded rather legal but Murdoch knew it was just a pretentious way of saying Mrs. Crofton was not dressed yet.

“No, don’t bother her. Miss Georgina will be sufficient.”

The housekeeper pulled back the brocade portieres from the drawing-room door.

“You can wait in here, sir. It’s a bit chilly, I haven’t got the fire going yet.”

Murdoch gave a little deprecating shrug. “It’s what I deserve for calling at such an early hour, ma’am.”

She looked flustered and, pushing aside another set of curtains, she ushered him into the room and hurried away down the hall.

The air of the drawing room was cool but the decorations were not. Murdoch had never seen anything quite like them. His first impression was that the room was spacious and full of sunlight, but he realized that this was an illusion created by a screen of mirrored panels at a right angle to the wall. The room was actually fairly small and much of the space was taken up by three Turkish couches covered by woven blankets of deep blue with a sun yellow and fire-red zigzag design. The woollen curtains looped across the threshold were of the same pattern. The most unusual feature, however, were the window frames, which

had a facade of slender white columns supporting arched lintels with scalloped edges, decorated in gold filigree. In the window bays were two earthenware pots, each filled with man-high pale green plants with flat, oblong spiny leaves. The marble fireplace was reflected several times over in the mirrors as was a brass birdcage where a pale yellow bird cocked its head at him curiously. Murdoch felt as if he had entered a foreign country.

He was about to test the tip of one of the spiny plants to see if it was as sharp as it appeared to be when the portieres were pushed aside and a woman made her entrance, heading straight for him, her hand outstretched. The housekeeper was behind her.

"Detective Murdoch, I'm Georgina Crofton. Mrs. Buchanan tells me you are in pursuit of thieves."

He shook hands although initially she had crooked her hand as to almost invite a kiss. She wasn't in the least imperious, however, and he put the gesture down to finishing-school training. Like her drawing room, Miss Crofton was exotic. She was tall, past middle age, with a face that seemed all nose and chin. Her hair was braided on top of her head and wrapped with a flowered scarf. She was wearing a long holland smock so bedaubed with paint it might have been used for her palette and she smelled faintly of turpentine.

"As a matter of fact, ma'am, that is not why I am here. I have no knowledge of thieves in the area."

She turned to the housekeeper. "But I thought you said..."

"That's what he told me, ma'am."

Murdoch had done no such thing but he didn't want to wrangle with the woman.

"Not thieves, ma'am, but a very serious matter I wish to discuss with you."

He thought an expression of wariness flashed across Georgina's face, but she said affably, "Of course, perhaps,

Mrs. Buchanan, you would be so good as to bring us some chocolate. I haven't had my morning chocolate, Mr. Murdoch, so I do hope you will join me."

"No, thank you, ma'am."

"Dear me. I'd better wait then. Hannah would you mind...perhaps Mrs. Crofton needs your assistance?"

The housekeeper didn't look happy about having to leave but she did so, pushing through the curtains like an actress making her exit.

"Please sit down, Mr. Murdoch." Georgina waved at one of the couches and took the one opposite. Murdoch moved aside a red tasselled bolster so he had room to sit while Miss Crofton reached over to one of the lacquered tables beside her, snapped open an ornate silver box, and took out a thin brown cigarillo.

"Would you like one, Mr. Murdoch?"

Briefly, he was tempted, they didn't come his way that often, but he shook his head.

"I hope you don't mind if I do. I'm quite an addict to the demon tobacco." She put her cigarette in a little clip on a stick, lit it, and drew in a deep grateful breath. The tobacco smell was slightly perfumed.

"So what is the nature of your business, sir?"

Murdoch took the envelope from his pocket, removed the mourning card, and held it in front of her.

"Did you take this photograph, ma'am?"

She held out her hand. "Let me see."

"I'll just hold it for you, if you don't mind, ma'am."

He leaned closer and she peered at it with myopic eyes. "Why yes, that's the Dowdell infant, isn't it? Poor lamb, he was with us such a short time and his parents were devastated at his loss." She blinked at Murdoch. "I don't understand why you, a police officer, are asking me about this photograph. How did it come into your possession?"

He didn't have a chance to answer before the door opened and Mrs. Buchanan returned, wheeling a tea trolley.

"You know what you're like if you don't have your chocolate," she said to Georgina, ignoring Murdoch.

Georgina smiled. "Hannah has been here since I was born. She feels she has the right to supersede my decisions."

The housekeeper lit a spirit lamp on the trolley and set an exquisite china pot on top of the ring.

"Please continue, sir," said Miss Crofton.

"I prefer to wait, ma'am."

"My goodness, you can say absolutely anything in front of Mrs. Buchanan. We have no secrets from her."

Maybe you do and maybe you don't, thought Murdoch, but I'm not about to flash photographs like these in front of an elderly servant.

"I'll wait," he repeated and saw the tightening of the housekeeper's lips. She desperately wanted to put him in his place and establish hers but didn't quite dare. She picked up a grater and a block of chocolate and shaved slivers into the pot. She gave it a thorough stirring, then poured some of the hot liquid into a china mug.

Behind Miss Crofton, Murdoch caught a glimpse of his own reflection. In his grey sealskin coat, he looked as out of place as a sparrow among parrots.

Mrs. Buchanan handed the mug to her mistress but made no attempt to leave.

"Mr. Murdoch is inquiring about one of my photographs, Hannah, but so far he hasn't said why. Surely you are not come to offer me a commission for the police are you, Mr. Murdoch?"

"No, ma'am."

Miss Crofton extinguished her cigarette on a silver dish. "Hannah, would you be so kind as to bring me a slice or two of that delicious seed cake you baked yesterday. I find I'm quite peckish."

Mrs. Buchanan shot a poisonous look at Murdoch and she flounced away, as much as a woman who is stiff with

rheumatism can flounce.

As soon as the door closed, Georgina frowned at Murdoch.

"I have hurt her feelings, sir, and I never wish to do that to somebody as valuable as my good nanny. What can possibly be so serious that it necessitates this secrecy?"

He handed her the card. "Look on the reverse if you will, ma'am."

She turned the photograph over, then held it closer to her face so she could read the words.

"Good gracious me. How disgusting. Who wrote such things?"

"I don't know for certain. That is what I am trying to find out. The photograph was discovered by a teacher in the desk of a young pupil at one of our schools."

"Has the boy been charged?"

"It was actually a girl, ma'am. And no she has not been charged as yet. She denied all knowledge of the photograph and how it came to be in her desk."

"Somebody is trying to cause trouble for her then?"

Murdoch shrugged. "Perhaps. When was the photograph taken?"

"Three months ago."

"Who else would have a copy of this photograph, ma'am? Other than Mr. and Mrs. Dowdell?"

"I can't really say. They ordered ten cards, which I made and delivered to them, but they no doubt gave them out to various people."

"Do you have a copy yourself?"

"Yes. I have the original plates and I usually retain a print in my files."

"Who else has access to your files, Miss Crofton?"

"They are not under lock and key if that's what you mean. Anybody in my household can open them if they wish."

Murdoch had taken out his notebook. "Who is in the household, Miss Crofton?"

"My mother, Mrs. Buchanan, our housekeeper, and our maid, Ruby."

"Her last name?"

"Adams."

"How long has she been in your employ?"

"About six months I suppose, surely that is irrelevant."

"Would you mind checking your files to see if the card is still there?"

"Of course it's there. Why on earth would it not be?"

"The brother of the girl in question says she had several photographs in her possession and some of them were mourning cards. Unfortunately, he didn't know where she obtained them. There is an older sister who is in service, we don't know exactly where. The girl has disappeared and is supposedly staying with her." Murdoch closed the notebook. "I would like to speak to your maid, if I may."

Georgina lit another cigarette. "I can assure you, Mr. Murdoch, we are not harbouring any lost child. We have a small household, and unless she is stowed in the water closet, I have not seen her." She puffed again and stared at him. "I do hope you believe me?"

Murdoch thought her distress seemed genuine, but he wasn't about to assume it was all righteous indignation. Not yet, not by a long shot.

"It isn't a matter of whether or not I believe you, ma'am. I would like to talk to Ruby Adams."

"In other words, you don't take my word."

"I'm a police officer, Miss Crofton. It's my job to be thorough."

She flushed at his response. "Very well, but I cannot permit you to speak to Ruby. She is timid enough as it is and speaking to a policeman would frighten her out of a week's growth. We have worked hard to bring her to the point she is now. Besides, she is not the girl you are looking for. Ruby

is an orphan. She had no family connections whatsoever. She came with excellent references and has never given a moment of trouble."

"I must insist, ma'am."

"Very well, if you must." She got up and tugged on the embroidered bell pull beside the fireplace. Mrs. Buchanan came in through the curtains so quickly, Murdoch wondered if she'd been eavesdropping in the hall.

"Ah, Hannah. Is Ruby in the house?"

"No ma'am. She is out on an errand."

"Ah, there you are, Mr. Murdoch. She isn't here. She is probably gone for the morning."

He turned to the housekeeper. "When do you expect Ruby to return?"

"Like Miss Georgina said, she has gone for the entire morning"

"A long errand."

"Yes, it is."

Miss Crofton extinguished her cigarette. "Hannah, will you go to the studio and look in my filing cupboard. I need to know if the Dowdell photograph is still there. That's Dowdell. You can bring it here."

The housekeeper left with the air of one who has won a victory. The bird gave a soft peep, and Georgina took yet another cigarette from the box and lit it. Murdoch thought that the action covered up the woman's uneasiness. She had dropped all pretence of polite manners and they sat in silence until the housekeeper returned.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

The curtains were shoved aside and Hannah returned. "Is this what you wanted, Miss Georgina?"

She handed her mistress a folder.

"Yes, that's the one and, see, Mr. Murdoch, the card is safely within." She reversed it. "And not defaced, needless to say."

She gave him the photograph and, aware of the intensity of the housekeeper's curiosity, he compared it to the one he had.

"The image in this card seems somewhat lighter than yours, Miss Crofton."

"Really?" She held the two cards side by side. "Yes, you're quite right. You've got good eyes. The process of development is a delicate one and sometimes I will lighten or darken a photograph by exposing it for various periods of time. That card is more exposed than mine."

"Is that significant?"

"It is possible that the copies I sold to the Dowdell couple were exposed to that degree, I don't really remember."

"But you did develop them all at the same time?"

"Yes. I always do, unless my client wants to order more."

Murdoch handed back the card. "I'd like to see your studio, if you please, ma'am."

"See my studio? What on earth for?"

"He wants his photograph taken," muttered Mrs. Buchanan.

"I feel that the girl is in grave danger, morally and perhaps even physically. It is most important that I track her down."

"What's he talking about?"

"Never mind, Hannah, I'll explain later." Georgina looked at Murdoch. "I quite understand your concern, detective, but I fail to see how visiting my studio will in any way further your investigation."

Murdoch stood up. "Allow me to best determine that, Miss Crofton."

"Very well." She stubbed out her cigarette in the silver dish and took a gulp of her chocolate. "Hannah, we'll be all right, thank you. Mama will be needing her breakfast soon, I'm sure." She swirled her way out of the room, leaving Murdoch to follow like a lackey. Mrs. Buchanan brought up the rear, then reluctantly left them to go back to the kitchen.

The studio was on the second floor of the house, facing onto the park. This time mirrors weren't necessary to give the illusion of spaciousness; the room was genuinely large. Two deep windows gave plenty of light, but Murdoch saw that the room was also equipped with electric lights.

"Here we are, Mr. Murdoch. My den of iniquity."

He didn't particularly like Miss Crofton's flippant tone. "I don't know how it can be that, ma'am, considering how many angels are watching over you."

In the corner of the room were at least a half a dozen plaster sculptures of angels occupied in such angelic tasks as playing the harp or praying. There were even a couple of fat cherubs suspended by wires from the ceiling. Georgina looked discomfited and waved her hand in the direction of

the large easel that was in the centre of the room. "My speciality is painting people who have passed on. The families often like me to include depictions of heavenly beings."

Murdoch indicated a raised dais near to the window. There was a plain upholstered chair in the centre, behind it a frame with a neck brace for holding the subject immobile. The rather ghastly image of a corpse being so propped up flashed through his mind but he thought it was more likely Georgina used it for restless children. There was a camera on a tripod in front of the dais.

"Do you take stereoscopic pictures, ma'am?"

"Not any more. They don't really suit my clients."

"Where do you keep your props? I assume you stock the usual plants, birdcages, leopard-skin rugs, and so forth."

"I use very little. My subjects rarely desire any elaborate photograph. A simple back cloth and the chair is all I need. I transpose the photograph to my canvas and I can add whatever I wish. And as I said, most of my work is done outside of the studio."

At the far end of the room were two doors. "Where do those doors lead, ma'am?"

"One leads to the servant stairs, the left one is the dark room. And don't ask if you can look in there because you can't. I am developing some prints."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Crofton, I must check."

He strode over to the doors, ignoring her protests. The left door did open onto a small room that was completely dark. It smelled strongly of what he presumed must be developing fluid. The door let in sufficient light that he could see a clothesline with several pieces of paper pegged on to it. He snatched one off the line. It was a photograph of a woman lying in a bed. The peacefulness of the position made it obvious he was looking at a corpse. He replaced the print and closed the door.

Miss Crofton glared at him. "You have probably ruined my photographs, sir, and they are irreplaceable."

"I apologize, ma'am," he said and opened the second door. It led to a narrow uncarpeted flight of stairs. If Miss Crofton was guilty of creating pornographic images, she had to be doing it somewhere else because in this room there was nowhere to store all the elaborate sets he had seen in the stereoscopic pictures.

"Are you satisfied, Mr. Murdoch? I can understand your concern about a young child who is presumed to have defaced one of my photographs but I am completely at a loss to know why you seem so determined to implicate me in the sordid situation. I am not responsible for what people do to my pictures."

Murdoch took out the photograph of Leonard Sims. "Would you take a look at this photograph, ma'am?"

She had to hold the card close to her face and he saw her look of shock and the quick recovery.

"Do you recognize the young man?"

"As a matter of fact, I do. He did some work for us recently. I'm afraid I don't remember his name, Simpson or something like that."

"Leonard Sims."

She pursed her lips. "That is possible. I see that somebody has drawn a black border around the card. Is that wishful thinking?"

"What do you mean, ma'am?"

"He was a thoroughly unpleasant young man. Quite untrustworthy. I gave him the sack. I suspected he was a deviant and I assume from his pose, I was right."

"He is, in fact, dead. He was murdered."

Her hand flew to her mouth. "God forbid. I truly did not mean to be flippant, Mr. Murdoch. Even Mr. Sims cannot deserve such an end."

"Indeed."

"Why are you asking about him, Mr. Murdoch?"

"At the moment, I know almost nothing about the young man and I need to find out whatever I can. This card was also in the desk of the girl I mentioned. She likely inked in the black borders. I fear she may know what happened to him. And if that is the case, she is in grave danger."

"Poor child."

Georgina's response seemed genuine, but Murdoch was puzzled about her reaction to the Sims card. It wasn't only the response of somebody being shown a photograph of someone she had known. That would elicit more curiosity than the flash of fear he'd seen in her eyes. She was hiding something, but for the life of him he didn't know what it was.

"Do you know where Sims lived?"

"No. I don't. He was here only for one day."

"He didn't mention any friends to you, or family?"

"Mr. Murdoch, you will probably see me as a callous and indifferent employer, but I had virtually no conversation with the young man. I told him what we needed and what his wages would be and that was that."

"Did he do the job?"

"Not well but yes, he did do most of it. Mrs. Buchanan paid him, and off he went."

Murdoch wasn't sure quite how to proceed and he might have taken Miss Crofton at her word if at that moment, a sudden flash of sunlight hadn't gleamed on something on the far side of the room. Tucked into one corner was a brass birdcage. He'd totally missed it when he first looked around. He got to his feet and walked over to it.

"Do you use this as a prop, ma'am?"

"Yes, I do. My little bird won't sing. I thought a larger cage would help but it hasn't. I use that empty one now as symbolic of the soul's flight from its earthly imprisonment. It is very popular."

Murdoch took Agnes's photograph from the envelope and compared the two cages. He thought the Crofton one

was richer but it was hard to tell. They could be the same. He came back to Georgina.

“Miss Crofton, I’d like you to sit down if you please. There is something more I must show you.”

If she was as innocent as she appeared to be, he didn’t want her to faint, or pretend to faint for that matter. Reluctantly, she did as he asked and perched on a paint-splattered stool near the easel. He stood beside her and handed her the envelope.

“These other two photographs were also in the girl’s desk. Please take a look at them, but I warn you they are most graphic.”

Her reaction to the Newly-wed photograph was a quick blink, but when she peered at the picture of Agnes, she recoiled and put the card down.

“If a grown man wants to make a complete exhibition of himself by not wearing his trolleywags, that is his business, but the child...who would do such a thing, Mr. Murdoch?”

“Who indeed? Do you recognize the girl, Miss Crofton?”

“Of course I do not. How could I?”

“Her name is Agnes Fisher.”

“That means nothing to me.”

She quickly returned the stereoscopic cards to the envelope and handed it to Murdoch, not meeting his eyes. “I can hardly comprehend that you have made a point of searching my studio, Mr. Murdoch. Surely you cannot for a moment believe I am in any way involved in the taking of these disgusting photographs?”

Her face was quite pink, but he couldn’t tell if it was from indignation or embarrassment. She might dress like a Bohemian and smoke like a man but underneath it all she was no doubt a well-brought-up woman who had never before in her life looked at such explicit scenes.

“As I said, Miss Crofton, I am afraid for the safety of this girl. I have to find the photographer and that means I

cannot afford to stand on ceremony. If I have offended you unjustifiably, I apologize.”

She turned away from him and he could see she was trembling. “Please leave me, sir. I presume you have seen all you need to see. You can let yourself out.”

Short of getting a warrant to search her entire house, there was nothing much more he could do. He walked over to the door.

“I am at Number Four Station on Parliament Street. If there is anything else that comes to you that you might think is helpful, please send for me.”

He’d half expected Mrs. Buchanan to be in the hall ready to leap on him, but there was no one.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

Ben Fisher was seated across the table from Ralph Tibbett and he'd just finished mopping up the gravy on his plate with a crust of bread.

"You liked that, eh?" Ralph beamed at him.

"It was good. That's the second beef pie I've had this week," added Ben, who thought that might impress Ralph.

"That so?" Ralph took a silver case from his pocket and removed a slender cigar.

"The truant officer bought me one," said Ben.

"Really?" He had Ralph's interest now. "I've never heard of a truant officer standing a boy to a beef pie. When did that happen?"

Ben picked up something in Ralph's tone and he began to feel uneasy. He'd been presenting his story to make himself look clever, but he thought it unwise to let drop that Murdoch was a police officer.

"He came to the house looking for Aggie."

"What exactly did he say?" Ralph clipped his cigar and lit it with a match.

"Aggie fainted in class and Miss Slade our teacher was worried about her so she sent this man. But Aggie weren't home so he couldn't talk to her."

“Talk to her about what?”

Ralph held the cigar between his teeth, which made him look as if he was grinning, which he wasn't. The boy shrank down in the seat.

“I don't know. Just why she'd fainted, I suppose.”

“Does Aggie ever have good old chins with you, Ben? You know, sister to brother heart to hearts?”

“Not our Aggie. Pa says she don't have two words at a stretch in her head. She's a quiet one.”

Ralph was studying him and Ben began to find it hard to breathe. “Didn't she ever mention that she helps us out as well?”

“No, sir, never.”

“Well she does and does very good too. She models for my employer. She's a pretty girl, your sister, and he uses her in certain photographs. You know, dressed like a shepherdess or an angel looking down on a baby. Did she never show you the pictures?”

“No, sir. I ain't seen anything.”

“You wouldn't fib to me, would you, Ben? These pictures are what's considered private property. Some people want them all to themselves. They don't want anybody gawking at their own private pictures. You can understand that, can't you, Ben?”

The boy had no idea what he was talking about but he nodded vigorously.

“Did this man from the school mention pictures?”

“No, sir. He just said that Aggie was in trouble and he wanted to help her.”

Ralph knocked off some ash on the edge of the table and Ben saw it land on the bare plank floor. There was no carpet, no cloth on the table either. Ralph had said that his employer was a wealthy man but nothing about his apartment revealed that. In fact, Ben would have thought he wasn't much better off than they were by the look of things. He wished he hadn't agreed to come, that he was

safely in his desk at school, making foghorn noises. He'd been practising and he thought Miss Slade would be pleased by his rendition. But he had been here with Ralph since this morning and, except for the beef pie, it had been a boring time. He'd been left to wander around the studio. He could stand boredom, however, he was used to it, but since Ralph had returned, the atmosphere had changed. He hadn't raised his voice or looked angry, but Ben's heart was pounding. He scurried around in his mind trying to find the words to appease him. What did he want to hear? Everything he said seemed to make matters worse.

"What kind of trouble is Aggie in, Ben?"

"I don't know, sir. Maybe she has a bun in the oven."

"What makes you think that?"

"Momma used to faint when she had a bun in the oven."

Ralph grimaced. "And how many buns did your mother bake before she passed away?"

Ben wasn't sure what he meant. Ralph scowled, his voice impatient. "Babies. How many babies did your mother have?"

"At least three that I remember. The last one got stuck in her belly, which was why she died."

"Indeed. How tragic. But Aggie isn't married. How could she have a baby inside her? You know you have to be married in a church before that happens, don't you, Ben?"

In fact, Ben knew that babies were made in a hot bed where they incubated like eggs and that if a girl grew fat and had a baby without having a husband, she was a wicked girl and would go to hell. Martha had explained it all to him one day. She had been instructing him on the necessity of not touching a girl until they were married in the eyes of God because if he did he would go to hell and have his member chopped off by the devil.

At that moment the door behind Ralph opened and a chubby man with a red face came in. Close behind him was a young woman whose fair hair was hanging loose and

unbrushed about her shoulders. To Ben's intense discomfort she was not wearing proper clothes, only a red silk gown that gaped open at the neck and looked as if it might come undone at any minute. Ben had never seen such a garment before but he guessed this was what well-to-do ladies wore in their bedrooms. Martha had told him as much on one of her infrequent visits after she had gone into service. She said her mistresses both wore silk gowns in their bedrooms and no stockings or shoes. They had thick carpets to walk on so they didn't get cold.

"What's this about being married? He's a bit young to have a trouble and strife, isn't he?" The man's voice was loud and should have sounded friendly but didn't. He had a funny way of pronouncing his words that Ben had heard occasionally at the market. He was from over the pond, he knew that. Ralph almost stood up.

"Afternoon, sir."

"Who's this woeful scrap of badness?"

"This is young Ben Fisher that I told you about. He's just had some good grub and we was having a chin about this and that."

Ben knew at once that Ralph was afraid of this new man and that he had to be even more careful what he said. Then to his dismay, the young woman walked over to Ralph and, plopping herself into his lap, kissed him hard on the lips.

"Hello, Renaldo, my pet. I missed you."

Ralph gave a warning glance in Ben's direction and the girl giggled. "Oops, sorry. I forgot...Mr. Tibbett and I are long-lost cousins," she said to Ben. "What you might call kissing cousins."

Her words were slurry, and except that she was so young and clean and in a red silk gown, Ben would have thought for certain she was hickey.

The man leaned and caught the girl by the wrist. Ben saw her wince but she didn't protest.

“Clara, my dear. Go and make us all a nice pot of char. Be quick. A very important customer is due in an hour.”

She got up promptly and walked to the door, staggering and almost colliding with a brass birdcage that was standing in the corner. There was no sign of a bird, Ben had made sure when he came into the room.

Not even waiting until the door had closed behind her, the man spoke to Ralph.

“Miss Clara is trying my patience.”

Ralph nodded. “She’s certainly becoming a handful.”

The other man put his forefinger against his temple. “A note to self. Do not allow Clara to have any of her, er, her cough syrup until the evening.” He smiled at Ben. “In case you’re wondering, little titch, I find it helps to say, ‘Make a note to self.’ Keeps everything tidy in my idea pot.” He tapped himself again a couple of times. “I’ve got a lot of business matters to keep straight. Now what were we saying? Oh yes, the boy getting married.”

Ralph smiled a false smile. “What we were talking about was actually Ben’s sister, Agnes. Seems like a truant officer was visiting the house because Aggie was taken ill at school. According to our laddie here, this man says Aggie’s in some kind of trouble and he wants to find her so he can help.”

“That so?” Uninvited, he picked up Ralph’s cigarette case and helped himself to a cigarillo. Ralph lit a match for him.

“Did he say what kind of trouble, young Ben?”

“No, he didn’t, sir.”

“Aggie fainted in class and Ben was worried that she might be having a baby, which was why I was explaining to him that that weren’t possible. Aggie ain’t got a husband.”

The man drew on his cigarillo and watched the red-hot ash eat into the paper. “That’s right, never mind her being so young, she’s what the reverend would describe as ‘pure.’” He chuckled. “At least I hope she is. I can’t go

around photographing girls to be angels if they aren't pure. That right, Mr. Tibbett?"

Ralph was lighting up another cigar and Ben could have sworn his hand shook. Without even being conscious of it, the boy eased himself away from the table so he would be free to run if a fight broke out.

"Tell me, young fellow, did this helpful officer have a name?"

Ben felt a shiver of fear run up his back. "I don't remember, sir."

"What did he look like then? Was he an old dodgy codger dressed in a black suit?"

"Oh no, sir. He wasn't old."

"But he had a beard for sure and a bald head?"

"No, sir. No beard, but he did have a moustache and he wasn't bald at all. He had wavy hair."

"A carrot top, I'll wager?"

Ben laughed. He seemed to be pleasing the man now. "Not at all. His hair was dark brown, sort of like mine."

"Ah. Was he as tall as me?"

"Not much taller, sir. About as big as Mr. Tibbett."

The man nodded at Renaldo. "Anybody you recognize?"

"No. Do you?"

"Maybe. Then again there are a lot of coves look like that. The point is if they're sending truant officers to the house, it's time we found Aggie ourselves. Poor girl might need our help and I've come to look on her as a daughter." He felt in his inside pocket and took out a paper bag. "Ben, I'm partial to sweeties and this bag is full of them. Here." He shoved one across the table to the boy. "Where might we find your sister, Ben?"

"I don't know, sir. She hasn't been home for the last two nights. Nor at school neither."

If telling this got Aggie into trouble but meant Ben had less of it, he didn't mind.

“Sometimes we have to work late into the night,” the man continued. “In which case your sister has been known to stay here with my good wife in charge. But she wasn’t working yesterday.” He tapped his finger. “Think, Ben. Where might she be staying?”

“They have a sister who’s in service,” interjected Tibbett. “Didn’t you say she was with her, Ben?”

“Yes, sir. That’s where she is most likely.”

“That so? Where’s your sister work, Ben?”

Ben hardly paused. It was one thing to risk Aggie’s ire, another entirely to aggravate Martha. He had sworn with a blood oath, painfully inflicted, that he would never tell anybody where she was.

“I don’t know, sir. She didn’t want Pa dunning her for her wages. She told Aggie but not me.”

“Any guesses then?”

“I think the house is one of the grand ones up in the end of the city. Where the bridge is.”

“Bloor Street, you mean?”

“Yes, sir.”

Bloor Street wasn’t far, not far enough at all, but it was the first place he thought of.

“You’re not fibbing me, are you, Ben?”

Ben looked him in the eyes in the way he had perfected over the years. “No, sir. Never. I’d tell you if I knew.”

The man grunted. “All right then.” He leaned forward and wiped off a speck of pie crust from the side of Ben’s mouth. “I can’t abide fibbers, little titch. I’d never hire anybody to work for me if I didn’t think I could trust them. Honest and close-mouthed, that’s the kind of boy I like. Are you that kind of boy, young Ben?”

He hadn’t moved his finger and he was pressing it hard into Ben’s cheek. His eyes were the colour of the lake in winter.

“Yes, sir.”

He let him go and held out the bag of candies. "Have a sweetie."

"What are we going to do about the girl?" Ralph asked, and again Ben trembled at his tone of voice.

"Do? We'll do nothing. She's probably tucked away nice and safe with her loving skin and blister. I don't think we need worry. She's a quiet girl. Isn't that right, little Ben?"

"Yes, sir."

The man shook the bag of sweets. "If Aggie shows up at your house and you come and tell me, or better still bring her with you, you can have the whole bag."

Ben made himself look happy about that.

The man scrutinized him for a moment, then he said, "Now, my lad, did Renaldo, that's what we call him here, did he tell you about our little business proposition?"

Tibbett answered, "No, I haven't said anything yet."

"Well then, here's the story, young Ben. A gentleman we know likes to see photographs of boys who are all dressed up like princes. He's an odd cove, I'll give you that, but who am I to judge? He'll only look at boys that are small like you and refined, just like you. Is there any boy at school that you could bring over for a test? I warn you, the gentleman nor me will not tolerate any rowdy rough boys who'll boast to everybody what they've been up to. The fellow must be a quiet sort, bit on the shy side if you like. Like princes are. And he must be able to keep a close mouth, just like you. This gentleman is very particular about his affairs being private. Now if you can bring us such a lad, young titch, you will get a whole bag of sweeties between you and a dollar for you alone. How's that suit you then, good deal, wouldn't you say, Renaldo?"

"The best. I wish I got as much when I was a calf."

"So, Ben, old son, is there any lad you know of who might suit us?"

Ben thought. He didn't have any friends to speak of and the only one he ever really got along with was Emmanuel

Hart and he wasn't at all small and refined. But there was a boy. He was younger, small and dark-haired, and he hung on the fringes of the playgroup and the groups of rowdy boys just the way Ben did.

"There's a boy I could bring. I take him home from school sometimes. His ma works because he doesn't have a pa."

"Poor laddie. That might make him all the more willing to earn a bit of dash to help his ma. What's his name, this cove?"

"He's from Wales. He's got a funny name. It's Alwyn Jones."

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

By the end of the day, Murdoch was tired and discouraged. He felt like a dog in a revolving cage, plodding on but going nowhere. He'd had the satisfaction of hauling Fisher out of bed but the man was so full of liquor, he was incoherent. Murdoch had only managed to shake out of him that he didn't know where Martha or Aggie were, and he had to accept that.

A prim clerk at the *Globe* newspaper office told him that they had no records of past transactions. If the account was paid that was an end to it. Why should they clutter the office with unnecessary pieces of paper? Murdoch had considered giving her an answer, but the question was rhetorical and the woman of middle age, so he swallowed his irritation and left.

Seymour had agreed to interview the people to whom the Dowdells had sent mourning cards and Murdoch went to check on the remaining photographic studios on his list. He offended several of them by asking about "naughty" pictures, but nobody admitted to having photographed such a thing, and they all seemed to be sincere. He made a brief stop at the Sackville Street School just as Miss Slade was entertaining the class by whistling a lively waltz that made

him want to practise a few reverse turns in the hall. She came out to him right away. Neither Agnes nor Ben Fisher had been in school. Promising he would come to the boarding house that night, he left to seek out the final three studios on his list. By dusk and the lighting of the street lamps, he had checked off the last studio.

Briefly, he was undecided as to whether to go directly to the lodging house to see if Seymour had any luck, or to go after he had visited Enid. He'd promised her he would redeem himself and come for the supper he'd missed the day before. That promise won out and he trudged off to Mrs. Barrett's house.

Enid opened the door and he knew without asking that this was another evening when the landlady was not at home. Enid was wearing her best blue silk taffeta dress and her hair was freshly and elaborately pinned. If he didn't know better he'd think she had applied a touch of rouge.

"My you look lovely, Enid," he exclaimed.

"This is in the way of a celebration. I received a banker's draft in the amount of ten dollars today from the competition." She lowered her voice. "And Mrs. Barrett is away to her sister's for two days."

Murdoch stepped into the hall, caught her in his arms, and gave her a hearty kiss.

"More cause for celebration."

"She was in an uncommonly good humour and she has given me permission to use the dining room." Enid smiled at him. "She got a notion in her head, how I don't know, that I would be entertaining some of my fellow competitors and I did not disabuse her."

He kissed her again. "Clever wench."

She took his hand and began to lead him down the hall. "Alwyn is in bed. I'm afraid he might be sickening for something, he has been so low and quiet. Perhaps after we've had our meal you could go up and say goodnight to him. That might cheer him up."

Murdoch thought that the only thing that would cheer up Enid's son was if he gave up all claim to her affections. He flinched. That was coming soon.

Enid ushered him into a dining room crammed with heavy dark furniture. She had lit a good fire and all the lamps in an attempt to make the room bright and welcoming but nothing could overcome its ugliness. The tablecloth at least was a white damask and Enid had laid it with her own china.

"Sit down and I'll bring in the dishes."

He took his place at the table and she left with a slight swish of taffeta and a waft of essence of roses. Murdoch leaned his head in his hands. Enid was making it clear that she welcomed his love but she was leaving the country and he couldn't see any future for them. And that was separate from the confusion of feelings he was having for her and Amy Slade. He grinned to himself. Maybe he was being entranced by the charms of the whistling waltzes, the way he'd heard Indian fakirs entranced snakes.

Enid opened the door carrying a tray loaded with covered dishes. "You're looking quite peaked, Will. You're not ill as well, I hope."

"No, not at all. I'm just tired and cold and foot sore and I seem to have spent a wasted day. I've made no progress in the case I'm working on. Although I did deliver the letter to Mr. Callahan, and it did the trick. Thank you very much for your help."

She smiled with pleasure. "I'm happy for that. Now, look you, I've made a roast of pork with boiled potatoes and cabbage, so I hope you have a hearty appetite."

He clutched the knife and fork in his fists, held them upright, banged them on the table, and proclaimed, "I have stomach of lion."

He tucked in to the meal and had eaten about two mouthfuls when Enid said, "I've never seen Alwyn so

dispirited. I'm worried that something happened this afternoon."

"Hmm?" said Murdoch, his mouth full of potato.

"One of the boys at school sometimes accompanies him home for me when I have to be out. I know you think I mollycoddle him, Will, but I feel more easy in myself if I know he is with somebody."

Murdoch nodded. He did think that, but he wasn't going to bring it up now.

"The other boy isn't much older than he is really so they can play together. I give him five cents and something to eat and the poor chappie is always after asking me if I'll be out." She poked at a piece of cabbage on her plate.

"According to Alwyn, instead of coming here as they usually do, Ben took him to a photography studio." She stopped, seeing his expression. "Will, what's the matter?"

"Did you say Ben?"

"Yes, Ben Fisher. He goes to the same school."

"My God." Murdoch pushed back his chair. "I have to talk to Alwyn."

"He's probably asleep by now. Please tell me what's the matter, you're frightening me."

He stared at her. "Enid, did Alwyn mention the name of the studio?"

"No, he didn't."

"Where was it?"

"I, er, I don't know. I wasn't paying a lot of attention."

She was preparing the meal in anticipation of his coming, Murdoch realized.

"What has happened? Did you receive a complaint? Did the boys break something?"

"No, nothing like that." Murdoch leaned forward and touched her hand. "What did Alwyn tell you?"

"Nothing at all. I think he regretted even saying where he'd been. But when I pressed him, he said he'd promised not to talk about it. Heaven knows why. All he would say

was that he was supposed to be a prince and he was to wear some nice clothes.”

She shook her hand free from Murdoch’s. “Will, you have a face like thunder. What is wrong?”

“Enid, a few days ago, a schoolteacher came to me because she found a photograph of one of her pupils hidden in a desk. It was vile. The girl is Agnes Fisher, Ben’s sister. She wouldn’t say a word to Miss Slade and now she has vanished. She could be in grave danger and I’ve been trying to track down the photographer.”

Enid’s hand was at her throat. “Are you trying to tell me that my son has been used in the same way?”

“Let’s talk to him.”

They hurried up the stairs to the little box room. There was a lamp turned low on the dresser.

“I’ll wake him,” said Enid. Gently, she called to her son and he stirred. She sat on the bed and said something to him in Welsh. He shifted to a sitting position, but seeing Murdoch, he shrank back into his pillow and spoke to his mother anxiously. She answered in English.

“Mr. Murdoch isn’t angry at you, Alwyn. He is troubled about a case he’s working on and he wants to ask you some questions.”

“What sort of questions?” The boy’s eyes were large and dark in the shadowy light.

Murdoch perched on the end of the bed and tried to make his face less frightening.

“Your mamma was telling me about you and Ben Fisher going to a photography studio this afternoon. Where was it, Alwyn?”

“I don’t know, Ben took me.”

“But you must know where you went. Was it north up to Gerrard Street? South to King Street? Where?”

Alwyn whimpered. “I don’t know. We were playing with the snow in the gutters and I was just following Ben.”

Murdoch stood up. "What is wrong with you? Surely you must know if you were going in a northerly direction or not..."

Alwyn yelped as if he had hit him and shrank into his mother's arms.

"Will, please! He's a child. He doesn't have a good sense of direction."

"Enid, there are very serious matters at stake here. I have not asked him a difficult question. He must answer it."

Suddenly, Murdoch had an image of himself at Alwyn's age cowering in his bed as his father shouted at him about some misdemeanour far more trivial than his fury warranted. Damn it anyway. He forced himself to calm down and he walked around to the other side of the bed.

Alwyn was sniffing against his mother's chest and Murdoch bent over and stroked his hair. "I'm sorry, lad, the reason I am so upset is because there are other children involved whose safety I am concerned about. One of them is Ben's sister, Agnes."

Alwyn's tear-stained face peeked out at him.

"Do you think you can talk to me now?"

A hardly perceptible nod.

"I'm not angry at Ben or Agnes. I want to help them. And I'm not angry with you either...but it would be a big help if you'd answer my questions."

Enid spoke to her son and reluctantly he straightened up.

"That's my brave lad," said Murdoch. "Now, first question. Was Aggie at the studio as well?"

"No," in a whisper.

"Was the person at the studio a man or a woman?"

"A lady."

Damn, thought Murdoch. "What did she look like?"

"She was like Mamma."

"In what way?"

"She was pretty and she had on a silk frock."

Enid gave her son a quick kiss on his forehead.

Murdoch frowned. He couldn't imagine even a small boy describing Georgina Crofton as pretty.

"Was there anybody else there?"

"Ben's friend..."

"A grownup or another boy?"

"A grownup. He's an actor."

"Did he tell you his name?"

"They call him Renaldo for the stage. He was getting me some work so I could help Mamma."

"What sort of work, son?"

"Being a prince in a photograph. I was going to get some sweeties and half a dollar. He was nice, but I didn't like the other man."

Murdoch couldn't help himself. He snapped his fingers. "Name? They must have used names when they spoke to each other, what were they?"

Alwyn whimpered again. "I didn't notice, but Ben told me the name of his friend but I forget what it was. He lives downstairs."

"What! Downstairs from Ben?"

"Yes. They have twins and Ben said he hears them crying a lot."

"Was his name Tibbett?"

"It could have been."

Murdoch had an image of a young mother, kindly offering him a candle. Surely, she was what she appeared to be.

"Did Mr. Tibbett take the photograph or the lady?"

A shake of the head from Alwyn. "No. There was another man there. The lady took us to get the nice clothes. We were going to be young gentlemen."

"Did you hear the name of this other man, Alwyn?"

Alwyn was still eyeing him nervously and he didn't want him scurrying back to his burrow like a timid rabbit. Murdoch softened his voice again. "Well, did you?"

Another shrinking back and a quick warning glance from Enid.

"I didn't hear it but I saw the sign on the door when we were leaving. His second name is Emperor. I could read it."

Murdoch let out a rush of breath. So he had been right. It was hard to hold back his impulse to run out of the room down to the Emporium.

"Did this man take a photograph of you in the nice clothes?"

Alwyn shook his head. "We didn't even have a chance to put them on. He said there was a gentleman coming who wanted to see what we looked like, to see if we'd do but he came before we were ready." He gazed up at his mother. "He was so rude, Mamma, he didn't knock or anything, he just walked in. Mr. Emperor was angry with him."

"What happened then, Alwyn?" asked Enid.

"Mr. Emperor took him into the front room, but we could hear them shouting. Then he came back and was in a bad skin." Tears started to roll from Alwyn's eyes. "I was afraid, Mamma. He grabbed me so hard, it hurt." He held up his arm and Murdoch could see the bruise near his wrist. Enid pulled her son close to her so she was speaking over his head.

"What does this mean, Will?"

Before he could answer, Alwyn burst out. "He said we wouldn't do any pictures today and Ben had to take me home but I mustn't say a word or I couldn't come back and get my wages." He was crying in earnest now. "I wanted to help with our passage to Wales, Mamma."

"Hush, darling, hush."

But nothing could stop the rush of words as the boy finally let go of his terror. Murdoch could only just make out what he was saying.

"The man that came was so ugly, Mamma. I tried to be a good boy but he frightened me so. And Ben too. I could tell. He was a monster, Mamma. Something had happened

to him like the king in the fairy story. The one who'd been turned into a beast until the princess loved him."

Murdoch stiffened. "What do you mean something had happened to him?" He had to wait until the racking sobs subsided sufficiently for him to be heard.

"Alwyn, describe this man to me."

"Enough, Will. He's had enough. Don't be so cruel."

"He must answer, Enid."

"He didn't have any hair...and his face was all white and wrinkled." The boy held up his hand, squeezing the fingers together. "His hand had got melted so it was like a bird's claw. And he couldn't walk properly."

Enid looked at Murdoch who had jerked back. "Do you know the man?"

All Murdoch could say was, "I bloody well do."

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

Leaving Enid to minister to the boy, Murdoch hurried down the stairs and began to trot as fast as he could along River Street. Alwyn's voice ran over and over in his head: *We were waiting for a gentleman who had to see if we would do*, and in had come Reordan. The boy said he had argued with Gregory. Had Reordan told him Murdoch was on his tail?

When he got to the lodging house he didn't wait politely on the doorstep but went straight into the hall. He was heading for the Irishman's room when Seymour came out of the kitchen, Amy Slade at his heels.

"Will, what's happened?"

"Is Reordan here?"

"He went out almost an hour ago."

"Did he say where he was going?"

"We didn't see him, we just heard him come in and go out again immediately after. I called to him to join us but he didn't even answer."

"What's the matter?" Amy asked.

As succinctly as he could, Murdoch told them Alwyn's story.

Amy sat down suddenly on the coat-tree seat. "And you think the man they were waiting for was Reordan?"

"No, I'm not certain of that. But he was undoubtedly the one who showed up at Gregory's studio at that moment."

"And Gregory is the photographer we've been looking for?" Seymour asked.

"He's the one, all right. There was another man present who they said was an actor who might be in the scene with them. He's called Renaldo, but Ben told Alwyn his real name was Tibbett. He lives in the rooms below the Fishers'."

"So he would know both Agnes and Ben," said Amy.

"Yes."

"Just a minute," said Seymour. "I've got to check something." He went down the hall and tried Reordan's door. It was unlocked and Seymour entered the room. Murdoch waited with Amy in the hall. She had replaced her severe navy jacket and white waist with a short-sleeved, green silk loose top. Her hair was down and tied back in a ribbon. She looked much younger and more vulnerable than he'd yet seen her.

"I cannot comprehend Ben taking the Welsh boy to that studio. How could he do such a thing?"

"We don't know anything yet. Ben might be an innocent himself. He told Alwyn that Gregory promised him a dollar and some sweets if he could find a suitable boy."

Seymour emerged from Reordan's room. "John had a pistol in his drawer. It's gone."

"What the devil...now what?"

Amy looked up at Murdoch. "You don't know Reordan as we do. He couldn't be involved in abusing children."

Murdoch shrugged. "We'll find out, won't we."

She frowned at him. "I am not speaking only about his character. He never leaves the house except for dire necessity. He is so ashamed about the way he looks. We would know if he was going out a lot."

Murdoch was skeptical. "Neither of you are at home during the day."

She shook her head. "I cannot believe it."

"I must admit, Will, I find it incredulous as well."

"It always is," said Murdoch. "But let's think logically, can we? Where might he go and why has he taken his revolver?"

"I think he's been in a very strange mood since we showed him that photograph," said Amy. "I thought he was dreadfully shocked."

"Could it be he has taken the law into his own hands?" asked Seymour. "Remember, he asked you if you had any suspicions as to who was the photographer."

"It's more likely he's done something like that. I refuse to believe he'd be a purchaser," said Amy.

"He could also be trying to destroy any evidence."

"No! I don't believe it."

"Regardless, we'd better get over to the bloody Emporium quick."

Amy reached for the cloak that was on the peg behind her. "I'll come with you."

"Don't be ridiculous," said Seymour. "This has all the indications of a dangerous situation."

"The only person John will listen to at all is me. If he's planning something harmful, I can talk him out of it...Please don't waste time trying to dissuade me, Mr. Murdoch. There is no time to argue. I am quite capable of taking responsibility for my own actions. I will not be a liability."

She was right, there was no time to argue, and he could tell arguing wouldn't work anyway. Short of tying her up, he had no way to stop her. Besides, what she said made sense and he already knew that Miss Amy Slade was a woman of her word. She would not be a liability.

Seymour hurried off to get his coat and hat. He came back downstairs carrying a policeman's short stick with a leather looped strap at the end.

"I kept this from my days on the beat. It may come in handy."

The three of them set off, Amy in the middle of the two men. Murdoch was prepared to hire any cab that came by but the street was deserted. Amy kept up with them even though they were jogtrotting. At the corner of King and River, they paused to get breath, just as a streetcar came rumbling by.

"Come on," shouted Murdoch and he set off at the run. The ticket collector saw him and signalled to the driver to stop. Seymour and Amy were right at his heels as Murdoch climbed aboard the streetcar. There were only a handful of passengers on board. He pulled out his official card and showed it to the driver.

"I'm commandeering this car on police business. No stops, as fast as you can to Church Street."

"What about my passengers?"

"They'll have to get out and catch the next car."

"There isn't one for half an hour."

"They'll survive."

Seymour was already moving down the aisle of the streetcar, telling the passengers they had to disembark at once. Fortunately they all looked like able-bodied men who wouldn't freeze to death waiting for another streetcar. They were curious but compliant, there were only a few grumbles. As soon as they were out, the driver started off, getting up the car to top speed. Amy sat on the bench.

The ticket collector came up to them. "Who's she? A police officer too?"

Murdoch didn't answer but something must have showed on his face because the man averted his glance. Seymour clung to one of the leather straps hanging from the ceiling of the car.

At top speed and with no need to stop for passengers, the streetcar was at the corner of King and Church in a matter of minutes.

"Stop here," said Murdoch. "Thanks, and keep my card so you can report what happened."

"I will," said the driver. "I hope it was worth it. If I get the can, I'll come after you."

The three of them jumped down.

"Will, look!" Seymour grabbed his arm and pointed at the roof of the Emporium building. A drift of black smoke was coming from around the frame of the top window. In the seconds they watched it, a tongue of flame appeared.

"My God, the place is on fire." Murdoch swirled toward Amy Slade. "There is an alarm box at the corner of Jarvis Street. Here's my key. There's a hook inside the box that you have to pull down. Let it slide back and the alarm will ring. You will have to stay there until the firemen arrive so you can direct them."

She took the key and set off on the run, her pantaloons making the going much easier than the encumbrance of a heavy skirt would have done.

Murdoch and Seymour raced across the road to the Emporium. A quick glance in the front window showed them the fire had not started in the empty downstairs store. The house was quiet, no shouting of occupants, no roaring of flames as yet. Murdoch tried the door leading to the upper floor and they went into the hallway. Seymour shone his lantern on the stairs, and they headed to the studio. There was an acrid smell of gathering smoke in the air.

The upstairs door was slightly ajar. Murdoch pushed it open and they stepped inside. A woman, bound and gagged, was in a chair in the middle of the room. It was Mrs. Gregory.

Her head was drooping on her chest and for a moment he thought she might be dead. However, as he crossed the

floor toward her, she jerked into consciousness, her eyes widened in terror.

“Mrs. Gregory, we are police officers.”

The gag was a woollen scarf that had been tightened cruelly around her mouth. Murdoch tugged it free and the woman began to scream.

“It’s all right, ma’am. You are safe,” he said, even though she probably couldn’t hear him above her own screams.

“Charlie, take her outside. I’ll check the studio.”

Thick smoke was rolling underneath the door to the adjoining room. Murdoch thought he could hear the crackling of flames.

Seymour began to untie the woman’s arms, and all the while she never stopped screaming. Murdoch left him to deal with her. He ran over to the other door and threw it open.

“Reordan? Are you in here?”

The smoke was so dense, he started to cough violently. Holding up his arm to shield his eyes he managed to get to the window. He’d snatched up Seymour’s night stick, and he used it to smash the glass. The fresh air came in with a rush and the smoke billowed and rolled but began to pour out of the window. Murdoch turned around, able to see more clearly.

On the dais in the very chair he himself had sat was a man, also tightly bound. He was not tied or gagged because there was no danger that he would run or call out. The entire side of his head was destroyed from the blast of a revolver, by the looks of it. There was enough of his face left for Murdoch to recognize the young man he had encountered when he first went to the Emporium. Ralph Tibbett. His upper torso was drenched in blood from the head wound but what was worse was that his trouser buttons had been opened and blood still seeped from the

injury that had been inflicted on him. He had been castrated.

CHAPTER FORTY

There was a loud crack from the other side of the room and more smoke gusted underneath the door and through the frame. Murdoch knew he couldn't wait for the fire truck to arrive. He didn't know if anybody was alive or where Reordan was. He wrapped his muffler around his nose and mouth and shoved open the door that led to Gregory's apartment.

The entire opposite wall seemed to be on fire, flames licking at the window frames and mantelpiece. However, opening the door had allowed some of the smoke to escape and he could see well enough.

In the centre of the room, as yet untouched by fire, was one of the most macabre scenes he had ever witnessed and it was to haunt him ever after.

Gregory was bound hand and foot to one of the central pillars. He was gagged but his eyes were open and he was alive. Stacked all around him in a pyre, were dozens of photographic cards and loose papers. John Reordan was in the process of emptying a drawer of folders on to the heap. Hearing Murdoch, he spun around. He had a revolver in his hand and he immediately pointed it.

“Don’t come any closer, Will. You don’t deserve to die, but I’ll kill you if you try to stop me.” His voice was hoarse.

“What the hell are you doing?”

Reordan continued to shove papers toward the pyre with his foot but without taking his eyes off Murdoch for a moment. “That’s it exactly. I’m sending him to hell.” He uttered a cry that was half sob. “I have very good reasons, Will.”

“John, he’ll be tried and sent down for a long time, I promise you.”

“That’s not enough.”

Murdoch went to say something, but Reordan yelled at him. “There’s more to it than you know. It’s personal.”

He was coughing from the smoke and very agitated but the gun was steady. Out of the corner of his eye, Murdoch saw Gregory heave against his bonds. Reordan saw him too and responded by throwing another folder on the pyre. He jerked his head in Gregory’s direction.

“He’s the one who tarred and feathered me...When you showed me that photograph of a man with his cock exposed, I recognized that man too, or should I say *it*. He has scars from the clap on his shaft. I dealt with him next door, and now I’m dealing with this one.”

Murdoch risked a glance at Gregory, whose frightened eyes fastened on his in desperation.

Reordan barked out at him. “Charlie told you he pissed on me, but he didn’t know the worst. Both of them raped me afterward.” Murdoch tried a small step forward but Reordan kept the revolver steadily aimed at his head. “When you said you suspected Gregory of doing those photographs and that he was an Englishman. I knew it was him. And I was right, of course. I’d know his voice if I was dying. If I’d gone blind, I’d know that voice.” He kicked some more cards to the heap, which Murdoch could see had been splattered with fluid. A smashed lamp on the floor indicated what that

splatter was. Reordan was seized with a spasm of coughing but didn't break his focus on Murdoch.

"I'm not the first person he's raped. You should see these cards and photographs. He was going to set something up with two young boys. I saw them when I came here."

Murdoch eased forward again. The smoke was worse and his eyes were stinging and watering so badly he could hardly see. He raised his voice over the noise of the flames.

"John, don't do this, I swear I'll bring him to justice."

Reordan gave a sort of laugh. "Come on, Murdoch. You must have seen Tibbett out there. There's no going back for me. Can you blame me? They're getting what they deserve."

Murdoch didn't know how much of this Gregory could hear but he was still struggling futilely with the bonds. He obviously knew what Reordan intended.

With his gun still aimed at Murdoch, Reordan reached to a table behind him where there was a lit candle in a holder.

Murdoch yelled at him. "John, stop. I'm not going to stand by and watch you burn a man alive."

He tried another step. Reordan cocked the hammer of the gun. "Don't be a fool, Will. This toe-ragger isn't worth it." Quickly, he stooped down and applied the candle flame to the paper. With a whoosh, the paper, soaked with lamp oil, burst into flames.

Then they both heard the bell of the fire truck as it raced toward the building. For one crucial second, Reordan was distracted and glanced over his shoulder. Murdoch leapt forward and grabbed his wrist, and they locked in a bizarre dance, pivoting and twisting. But his assailant had a demented strength and he flung Murdoch to the ground. He rolled to one side, expecting to be shot, keeping his eye on Reordan. The Irishman lowered the gun, then suddenly thrust it underneath his own chin and pulled the trigger. The impact threw him backward into the heart of the fire.

Murdoch scrambled to his feet and waded into the burning pile, kicking away the cards and paper. The flames had raced greedily toward Gregory and his clothing and hair were on fire. The rope cords that were binding him were also burning. At the edge of his consciousness, Murdoch could feel pain in his own legs, but he tugged Gregory free, and dragged him away from the flames.

Suddenly he was aware of Seymour beside him. He had a blanket, which he threw over Gregory to smother the flames. By now the gag had burned off and the man was screaming, not the full-bodied cry of his wife but a thin, shrill wail, just as persistent.

Behind them, where the windows had been, there was a sudden, explosive hiss of water as the hoses were directed at the wall from the fire truck below. Dense, choking smoke billowed toward them.

"Get his legs," said Murdoch and he lifted Gregory underneath his arms. Gasping, almost blind, they managed to carry him into the studio, where there was less smoke, and lie him on the floor. His exposed skin had turned black and blistered, and in places the burns were more severe and oozed blood. Coughing and spluttering, both Seymour and Murdoch fell on their knees, struggling for air. Then the door was shattered and what seemed like an army of firemen burst in.

"Get out of here," one of them yelled, and Seymour and Murdoch scooped up the injured man again and staggered to the stairs. Halfway down they met with more firemen and one of them unceremoniously took Gregory from them, tossed him over his shoulders, and ran down the stairs. His lungs burning, Murdoch followed, Seymour behind him.

Outside, a crowd of people were being held back by two constables who had answered the alarm. Amy Slade was among them and she ducked under the restraining arm of the officer and ran toward them.

"Where's John?"

Murdoch found himself suddenly sitting on the curb. His hand, legs, and feet were excruciatingly painful and he saw in surprise that the bottom of his trousers were in blackened shreds and that his boots were smoking.

“He shot himself.”

Seymour was in better condition than Murdoch. “We’ve got to get Will to hospital.”

Amy turned and called to a man who had pulled up in his carriage and in spite of the nervousness of his horse was leaning out of the carriage window, intent on watching the proceedings.

“You, sir. These men are police officers. They must be taken to hospital immediately.”

The man obeyed without the slightest hesitation. He recognized an Amazon when he met one. He jumped out and opened his carriage door.

Amy and Seymour helped Murdoch to stand and all three climbed into the plush interior of the carriage. The last thing Murdoch saw as they drove away were the billowing clouds of smoke and fire as the Emporium was consumed by flames.

EPILOGUE

Murdoch wanted to take one last look around the house to make sure it was sparkingly clean for the new arrivals. Not that he needed to. Mrs. Kitchen had spent two entire days before she and Arthur left for Muskoka, polishing and washing everything, floor to ceiling. Murdoch limped into the parlour. His right foot had blistered badly, and he still found it painful to draw in a deep breath, but he was on the mend. He'd been given two paid weeks leave of absence, which was astonishingly generous coming from Brackenreid. However, he was in the inspector's good books. The case had received a lot of attention in the newspapers and Brackenreid felt his police officers had come off in a favourable light. He had even intimated that Murdoch would be promoted to full detective as soon as the opportunity arose.

Bartholomew Gregory had not survived his injuries, and his widow told the police everything they needed to know about her husband's sideline. Clara Hill had been at her boarding house when the fire happened, but she too testified to her role in the taking of pornographic photographs. As far as Murdoch could tell, she was unrepentant. It was a job like any other. Both she and Mrs. Gregory swore they knew nothing about the misuse of children, but Murdoch didn't believe either of them. He was sorry when Clara got a reduced sentence by providing a list of Gregory's customers. As far as Murdoch was concerned it was a depressingly long list.

It turned out that Agnes Fisher was safely hidden away at the home of a coloured woman, Honoria Davis, who cleaned the studios and sometimes modelled for the more benign photographs. The day after the fire, when Honoria discovered what had happened, she had brought Agnes to

the police station where she told Brackenreid what she knew, including details concerning the murder of Leonard Sims. Later, Murdoch discovered that the inspector had been openly skeptical of Agnes's story and profession of innocence but Honoria supported what she had said. Honoria wasn't charged but Agnes was placed at once in the Girls Home on Gerrard Street.

Murdoch brought Brackenreid the photographs that Amy Slade had found because they would be needed in the inevitable investigation. In the meantime, however, he slipped the Dowdell photograph into a folder. When Agnes went before the police magistrate, she could plead coercion with regard to the obscene picture but she would be in serious trouble if the magistrate saw what she had written on the back of the mourning card. Murdoch didn't think it necessary for anybody else to know about it. Amy Slade had engaged the services of the hirsute Mr. Wilkinson, and Murdoch felt confident that Agnes wouldn't be sent to the Mercer Reformatory.

Aggie had revealed the address of her older sister and Murdoch wasn't surprised to hear it was the Crofton residence, Martha Fisher metamorphosed into Ruby Adams. When he limped over with Seymour to inform them of the situation, Georgina and her mother had declared unswerving loyalty to their maid and had promised they would act charitably toward the younger sister and brother. Murdoch had noticed the ambivalence on Ruby's face, and he felt sorry for her. She had obviously hoped to make a clean break from the squalor of her family life. He thought there was still something covert about Miss Crofton, but he didn't know what it was and frankly didn't care. She seemed to him to be a generous-hearted woman, eccentric yes, but basically decent. Ruby's adoration of her counted for a lot as far as he was concerned.

Ben was left with his father, but Seymour and Murdoch had paid a visit to Mr. Fisher and scared the life out of him.

They made it clear they would not tolerate any misuse of the boy and if Ben so much as had a scratch when he showed up at school, Fisher would be held accountable.

Murdoch glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece. It was a handsome piece of ormolu and brass, a parting gift from Enid. She'd managed a smile when she gave it to him.

"Perhaps when you check the time, you will think of me."

He'd taken her in his arms at that, but she had not returned his embrace. She had already left him. For a week, Murdoch had moped around the empty house, relieved only by daily visits from Charlie Seymour. It was he who had come up with the request. With Reordan dead, his aunt who owned the River Street house had decided she would sell at once. Seymour, Wilkinson, and Amy would soon be homeless. Wilkinson moved back into his parent's home, and Seymour asked Murdoch if he could rent a room in the Kitchens' house. Murdoch was more than happy to do so.

"What about Amy?" he asked.

"Well, I was wondering if she could move in as well. She's reluctant to approach you herself, she doesn't want to impose, so I'm asking for her."

Murdoch was flustered. His previous experience of attractive boarders had been with Enid, who had lived here for a while. She had moved out, claiming that proximity should not be mistaken for love. In that case she was probably right, and Murdoch didn't want to repeat the mistake with Miss Slade, around whom his feelings swirled and surged like an adolescent boy's.

However, it seemed churlish and embarrassing to refuse her lodgings and he'd agreed. Yesterday, both she and Seymour had brought over their belongings. Charlie was taking Enid's old room and Amy was in the front parlour.

Over the evening meal, which Murdoch had cooked to perfection, if he said so himself, Amy had made her own request. "My situation is shaky enough," she said. "I don't want my schoolboard to know I'm living with two

bachelors," She had a proposal and this Murdoch had accepted willingly. This afternoon, he was getting his third lodger.

There was knocking at the door and he limped off to answer it. Amy Slade was standing outside. She had an infant in her arms, bundled up against the cold. The baby's mother was holding the twin.

"Will you hold Jacob for a minute?" Amy asked. "I have to pay the cabbie."

She thrust the baby into his arms. Alarmed by the sudden transition, Jacob let out a wail of distress. His brother immediately answered in kind.

"Mrs. Tibbett, do come in, and welcome," said Murdoch. He had to raise his voice above the din. Shyly, Kate came into the house. She looked pale and ill-nourished although the babies seemed bonny.

"Your room is down here. I hope it will be suitable for you," said Murdoch. Kate looked as if she was about to burst into tears but she followed him down the hall to the room that the Kitchens had occupied. Little Jacob's cries were unabated and Murdoch held him close against his chest, jiggling him slightly. Abruptly the baby stopped crying, reduced to some snuffles. His tear-filled eyes looked up at Murdoch, who smiled down at him.

"There you are. I'm not so bad, am I?"

Jacob reached up with his plump hand and grabbed Murdoch's moustache, causing him to yelp in pain.

"What have I got myself into," he wondered.

AUTHOR'S NOTE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

One of the unfailing pleasures of research for me is discovering pieces of history I didn't know about before. The Noble and Holy Order of Knights is one such example. A North American labour organization that numbered almost a million members at its peak, it had started to fade by the turn of the century but was still a force to be reckoned with. The aims and principles I have related in the book are those of the Knights. The workers strike in Ottawa did happen but not the injury that I have ascribed to one of my characters.

In 1895, the magnificent typewriting machine was becoming common, and a popular form of entertainment was the typewriting competitions. Miss Orr was indeed the champion of typewriters.

Unfortunately, what exists now existed then in terms of pornographic photographs and the misuse of children.



I never cease to be amazed and grateful that so many people are willing to share their time and expertise with me. Thank you especially to Gregory S. Kealey, who, together with Bryan D. Palmer, is the author of *Dreaming of What Might Be*, the story of the Knights of Labour in Ontario, and

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VICES OF MY BLOOD

A Murdoch Mystery

Maureen Jennings



MCCLELLAND & STEWART

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Vices
of My Blood



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Author's Note and Acknowledgements

To Iden, as always

And to Al and Barbara Lyons,
who have been there from the very beginning

... as truly as to heaven
I do confess the vices of my blood,
So justly to your grave ears I'll present
How I did thrive in this fair lady's love
And she in mine

-William Shakespeare, *Othello* , Act I , sc. iii

Prologue

ESTHER GOT OUT OF BED , wrapped a shawl around her thin shoulders, and shuffled over to the window. The winter morning light was dull, the sky heavy with unshed snow, and the window itself was crusted with a rime of frost on the inside. She peered down into the street below, where a few men were making their way to work, all huddled into their coats against the cold. She must have slept longer than usual. She glanced over at the bed where her son Wilf was now awake. He started to make a tortured, guttural sound, which she knew meant that he needed to use the commode.

Her daughter was still asleep, the threadbare quilt pulled over her nose for warmth. Strands of her dark hair were spread on the pillow, and Esther felt an unaccustomed rush of tenderness at the sight. They'd had a bad row last night when she'd tried to tell Josie she had to be up early for the Visitor. Josie had cursed, upsetting Esther with the vileness of her language and told her daughter so. Josie had laughed at that. "I should think that's the least of your worries, Ma. I doubt God is going to punish me for a few cuss words and overlook everything else. But you never know, maybe he's just like you."

It was as if she had stabbed her mother in her heart, the sensation so physical Esther had been forced to sit down. Later, trying to explain to Josie what she had done that afternoon, Esther said it was because of that one remark. She felt as if she had been living in a fog and an icy wind came and blew it away. She could see clearly the squalor of the room where all three of them lived. She knew she'd grovelled before the authorities to get their charity. She

stared into a pit of despair and saw her own destroyed soul reflected back at her.

“So you might say, ‘The worm turned.’ Yes, that’s the best way to put it, ‘The worm turned.’” Esther laughed as if she’d said something witty, but a soft, plump-bodied worm wasn’t anything like the hard, sharp anger that suddenly bit at her guts, like a cancer she’d been carrying for a long time without knowing it.

Chapter One

WILLIAM MURDOCH HAD RECENTLY been promoted from acting to full detective and given a raise in wages of three dollars a month. But his new status was not reflected by a better office, and from his desk he was contemplating the same old furnishings of a battered metal filing cabinet and a visitor's chair that the rag-and-bones man would have rejected. The walls, he noticed, would benefit greatly from a fresh coat of paint, as he was wont to use the one wall as a blackboard and the chalk marks never quite rubbed off. He needed a new lamp, or at least some better oil, as the one on his desk was smoking badly.

Having made this gloomy assessment, he took a gulp of the hot strong tea that he'd brought in from the duty room and got back to his task. He dipped his pen into the inkwell. He had a fine working fountain pen in his pocket, but he couldn't bring himself to write a letter to his absent mistress with a pen his beloved deceased fiancée had given him.

Dear Enid. I haven't yet received a letter from you, but I hope that is only because of the bad weather and not because you don't want to write to me. How is your father faring?

He paused. That last line seemed ridiculously stiff. But he'd have to leave it. This was the third draft he'd started. Oh just cross out *faring* , for Christ's sake.

How is your father? I do hope his health is improving .

Of course, the reason she had not written could be because her father had died. If that was the case he wondered if she would return to Canada. And then he wondered how he would feel about that if she did. It had

been almost two months since she had been summoned back to Wales to take care of her ailing parent. This had been the primary and acknowledged reason for her departure, but they both knew that sitting just behind it was Murdoch's inability to make up his mind to marry her.

Another dip in the ink and he made a large blot on the page. *Damn*. These pens were police issue and leaked badly. His fingers were stained already.

Tell Alwyn I am thinking of him. I have still got his sled and

...

He'd been going to write *and I look forward to the time when he returns*, but that was implying a promise he didn't know if he could keep.

He looked at the letter. It was a mess with two crossing-outs and three blots. He crumpled it up and threw it into the basket with the others. He'd write later at home, not here at the police station where there were distractions. He'd heard the clack of the telegram machine in the front hall and decided to get up and see if anything interesting had come over the wire. It had been a quiet day so far.

He swallowed the rest of his tea and went out into the main hall.

There were no miscreants or supplicants gracing the wooden bench that ran around the room and it wasn't time for the shifts to change so the only two officers present were the stenographer, Callahan, and the duty sergeant, Gardiner, who was sitting at his high stool behind the desk. He grinned when he saw Murdoch and waved a piece of paper.

"We've got a telegram from Hamilton. Callahan just typed it up. You might want to have a look at it." He handed Murdoch the wire.

BE ADVISED STOP WATCH FOR QUEER PLUNGERS STOP WE SUSPECT A
SUPPOSED FAMILY OF THREE STOP WOMAN MID AGE STOP YOUNGER
MAN STOP ONE BOY ABOUT EIGHT TO TEN YEARS OLD STOP COULD

BE RELATED TO EITHER STOP PROBABLY IN TORONTO AND WORKING
THE KING STREET AREA STOP ALIASES GIVEN AS MRS WRIGHT AND
SON BOBBIE STOP NO NAME FOR MAN STOP VERY CONVINCING STOP

Murdoch saw that Callahan was watching him curiously, but he averted his eyes immediately when Murdoch glanced his way. The constable was almost obsequious in his dealings with the detective, whom he feared. With good reason. Murdoch couldn't stand the fellow.

He walked over to him. "You're no doubt wondering, young Liam, what a queer plunger is."

Callahan nodded, apparently unsure how he was supposed to reply. Murdoch perched on the edge of the desk. "Never be afraid to admit you don't know something, young Liam. You don't want to be a constable third class forever, do you?"

Callahan flushed. "No, sir."

"Thought not. Our lad is ambitious, sergeant. Don't let that fresh-faced, just-off-the-boat look fool you. Right, Liam?"

Murdoch was goading him to the point of eruption, but the stenographer swallowed hard. He smiled a snake smile but his eyes were dark with anger, and Murdoch could see that thoughts of revenge were churning in his mind. He didn't care. He knew very well that Callahan was as two-faced as the month of January.

He gestured at Gardiner, who looked puzzled by Murdoch's uncharacteristic incivility. "Explain to the lad, sergeant."

Gardiner pursed his lips, going along with it.

"Queer plungers is a cant term for folks who commit fraudulent acts upon the public. Typically, they work in groups of three or more. For instance, a favourite trick is for one of the group to pretend to be despondent, and in full view of a crowd, he will plunge into some water, the lake or a river like the Don. The second member of the gang will

then effect a rescue. The half-drowned one will be taken to the closest house. They always make sure it's a tavern or failing that a church just emptying of the congregation. Then there is some cock-and-bull story about why the poor man wanted to commit self-murder in the first place. Debts of honour, most like. A go-around is suggested so he can redeem himself. Another go-around for the rescuer. Get the picture?"

"I do, sir, thank you. I suppose they can only really pull that one in summer."

"Mostly. They do other things, of course. If there's a woman involved, the boy acts as her son and he might take a dive under a carriage and then pretend to be injured. Or he might be a pickpocket and take off with her savings that she was just about to deposit at the bank. The possibilities are endless, the common denominator is the go-around, where they rely on public sympathy. As long as they move from place to place, they can get away with a lot, and believe me, if they get a good crowd, the takings can be more in one day than Murdoch and me make in a week. Last Christmas Eve, we nabbed two young tads who'd got fifteen dollars in their pockets."

Callahan looked impressed.

"Mind you," interjected Murdoch, "the one titch had a broken collarbone from being stomped on by the horses, so the price can be high."

"Yes, sir. I wasn't considering taking up queer plunging, if that's what you are implying." Callahan tried a tentative smile.

"Of course not, constable, I know you're too canny for that. But it's one way to earn your daily bread."

The constable spat out, "It almost sounds like you condone what they do, sir. But they are breaking the law after all."

Murdoch shrugged. "They're harmless enough."

"Judge Rose doesn't share your opinion, sir. I heard he sent down a pickpocket for two years' hard labour. And Judge Pedlow ordered ten stripes of the lash for a man who robbed a farmhouse in Markham."

"So they should," chipped in Gardiner. "You've got to put the fear of God into people like that or there's no knowing what they'll do."

Murdoch went back to the duty desk. The disparities between certain crimes and the punishments they were accorded had bothered him for a long time, but this wasn't the place to debate it. The sergeant was an affable sort to those he considered peers but punctilious to a fault when it came to lawbreakers.

"Anything else I should know about?"

Gardiner gave him a rather sheepish look and lowered his voice. "Not in the work line, but I wanted to let you know that Mary and me are going to have a young 'un."

Murdoch thrust out his hand. "Congratulations, Henry. What's that now, your sixth?"

Gardiner shook hands. "Seven, actually. Mary dearly wants a little girl this time. And by the way, she wanted me to ask if you've heard from Mrs. Kitchen as to how Arthur is getting on?"

"He's doing well. Mrs. K sounds quite optimistic."

"That would be a miracle if he recovered. Mary don't think he'll see spring."

They were interrupted by the shrill ring of the telephone. Callahan picked up the receiver and put it to his ear.

"Number four station."

There was a pause while he listened to the message being relayed, some alarm on his face. He scribbled something down on the message pad in front of him, as the other two watched. He replaced the receiver on the hook, and swivelled around to address Murdoch.

He was excited.

"The alarm has been sounded at Jarvis Street and Carlton, sir. Headquarters says to get over to Chalmers Church right away. Apparently, the pastor there has been found murdered."

"Good heavens, that's my own church," exclaimed Gardiner. "Surely it's not Mr. Howard."

Callahan checked the notepad. "Yes, sir. That is the name I was given. Reverend Charles Howard."

"Do you have any details?"

"Only that it has just been discovered. One of the parishioners found him. He had been stabbed and beaten."

Gardiner flinched. "Any culprit apprehended?"

"Not so far, sir. Constable Fyfer raised the alarm. He is at the church now."

Murdoch was already over at the coat rack retrieving his coat and forage hat.

"This is absolutely dreadful," said the sergeant. "I can't believe it. Reverend Howard is a fine fellow. As good as they come."

"We'd better order out the ambulance," said Murdoch.

"Shall I telephone for a physician, sir?" Callahan asked.

Murdoch nodded. "I'll meet him at the church." He hustled into his coat. "I'll ride my wheel, it'll be faster."

Gardiner leaned his head on his hand, and Murdoch went over to him and touched his shoulder in sympathy.

"I'm sorry, Henry."

"I just saw the man on Sunday. As hale and hearty as you and me. And he has a young family. How his wife will take it, I don't know. She is devoted to him. What the deuce could have happened?"

Murdoch headed for the door. "Send Crabtree over as soon as he comes back from his tea, will you?"

Once outside, he grabbed his bicycle from where it was leaning against the station wall, lit the oil lamp, and pedalled off along Wilton Street. The year was still more on the side of winter than spring and there was a vicious bite in

the air. Darkness was taking over and the streets were full of people hurrying to get home to a warm fire and their tea. As he turned right onto Church Street, a streetcar clanged by, jammed to capacity with passengers. Murdoch kept to the side of the road. It was all too easy to catch a wheel in the tracks. He'd crashed twice before in that way and still had a lump on his elbow to show for it.

Some people on the streetcar were watching him and, not for the first time, Murdoch was struck with the separateness of human life. A man was lying murdered, a good man, said Gardiner. His wife was now widowed and children orphaned. Their lives were changed irrevocably and yet the lives of everybody else continued. Once again some poor woman would be struggling to understand how God could have mercy and yet so cruelly take away.

Murdoch had investigated murders before, of course, and he was experiencing his usual feelings of both apprehension and excitement as he approached the place of the crime. "What happened?" Gardiner had moaned, and for Murdoch the reason for being a detective was the need to find the answer to that question.

Chapter Two

CHALMERS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH was a large grey stone building that sat at the northwest corner of the Allan Horticultural Gardens. Murdoch was there within six minutes. Constable Fyfer had positioned himself at the top of the steps and in front of the double doors. A dozen or more people had already gathered to one side and were standing together watching expectantly.

Murdoch dismounted, caught hold of one of the spectators, a clerk by the look of him, and told him to take care of the bicycle. Then he joined Fyfer, who gave him an almost-military salute.

"What's happened, constable?"

"It looks like the pastor of the church has been murdered, sir. His body's in his office at the rear of the church. He's been stabbed."

They were interrupted by the bike-minding clerk, who called out, "Give us the truth, officer. What's going on?"

"Never you mind," Murdoch shouted back. He couldn't stand the morbid curiosity that came out when there was a police affair.

"I assume you haven't seen anybody leaving the church," he said to Fyfer.

"No, sir. Not a soul. From the feel of the body, he hasn't been dead that long, but as there was just me, I didn't try to search the church proper. It seemed the most sensible thing to do was to keep watch until help arrived. I came out and blew my whistle to summon the closest constable. Fortunately, Constable Dewhurst was at the end of the

Carlton Street beat and he came running. I sent him to guard the rear while I dealt with the lady."

"Surely not the pastor's wife?"

"No, sir, the lady that found the body. She is one of the parishioners who was coming for a meeting. Not surprisingly, she was quite hysterical, and I didn't know what the heck was happening because she had blood on her face and hands and down her cape. I thought maybe she'd hurt herself. Finally, I got out of her that she'd found a body in the church. Somebody named Charles. Lucky for me, a man who lives on Carlton heard the commotion and came to see. I put him in charge of her while I went into the church."

"Where is she now?"

"He's taken her to her own home. I've got names and addresses."

"Good work, constable."

Fyfer was a new transfer to number four station and Murdoch hadn't worked with him before. He was impressed with the young officer's brisk, efficient demeanour.

Just then they heard the sound of the ambulance bell and the clatter of hooves as the horses galloped up Jarvis Street. Constable George Crabtree was seated beside the driver, and as soon as they pulled over, he jumped off and, pushing through the onlookers, bounded up the steps. He was a giant of a man, made taller by his helmet and winter cape, and the crowd parted in front of him except for one woman who yelled angrily, "Oi, who'd you think you're shoving?" as her wide, over-trimmed hat was tilted to one side, almost bending one of the tall purple feathers.

Murdoch nodded at him. "George, take over from Constable Fyfer while we go inside. Keep the vultures at bay. Don't let anybody in or out, and for God's sake, don't get drawn into talking to them. We don't want the man's wife to hear anything until we have a definite confirmation it is the minister."

"Right, sir. And the physician should be here in a tick."

Murdoch beckoned to Fyfer. "Show me where he is."

"This way." Fyfer headed down the steps to the brick walkway that ran between the church and Carlton Street. He opened the side door and let Murdoch through into a hall. "In there. It's a mess, sir. Worse'n a butcher's shop."

Murdoch went to the threshold. A butcher shop, indeed. A man was sprawled, twisted half on his back in the middle of the room, with what looked like a narrow dagger protruding from the right side of his neck. The weapon must have severed the artery, for blood had spurted everywhere. The front of the man's clothes were soaked and the pale blue carpet was drenched around the upper torso of the body. The side of the man's face was smashed in, the right eye socket completely destroyed. His other eye was open and staring.

Murdoch looked over at the constable. He knew it was important to present a good example to the new young officer, but his own heart was beating faster. The murderer had left behind his own violence, it hung in the air and it was impossible not to be affected by it.

"Are you all right, Fyfer?"

"Quite all right, thank you, sir."

"Is this your first murder case?"

"Yes, sir. A few assaults and drunk and disorderlies is all I've dealt with to date."

"The vile smell is because his bowels have evacuated. That usually happens with sudden death."

"Yes, I know, sir. My father was a butcher. I'm used to death."

Murdoch thought surely there was a difference between slaughtered cattle and a human being who had been brutally murdered, but he wasn't about to argue the point now. Better an officer who had his wits about him than one who didn't.

He glanced around the room. The curtains had been drawn and, on a desk to the right, a lamp was burning.

“What would help is to have more light in here. There’s another lamp over there on the mantelpiece. Bring it over, will you?”

Fyfer went to do his bidding and Murdoch moved in closer to the body. The dead man was middle-aged, with thick dark hair liberally streaked with grey. Except for full side whiskers, he was clean-shaven. A handsome face, Murdoch thought. He was wearing the typical clothes of his profession: a black suit and a black waistcoat. His once-white shirt and cravat were crimson with blood.

The constable brought the second lamp over.

“Put it on that table and turn both wicks up as high as they will go. Don’t tread in the blood.”

Murdoch squatted on his heels, trying to get a sense of what had happened. He could see now that the weapon was a letter opener, and it had been plunged with such force into the pastor’s neck that only three inches of blade were visible. He touched the man’s forehead. The skin was cool but not yet icy cold. Fyfer was right, he had died quite recently. Gently he lifted both hands. They were covered with blood and he took out his handkerchief to wipe it away. There was ink on the forefinger and thumb of the right hand.

“I don’t see any defensive wounds, so the blood is probably because he was clutching at his neck to pull out the knife,” he said to Fyfer.

“What about the other injuries, sir? It looks like somebody gave him the boots.”

“The post-mortem examination should tell us more exactly, but I’m sure you’re right. Speaking of boots, his have gone. And hurriedly, by the look of it.” The socks were half off the man’s feet. He leaned in. “Look at this, Fyfer, the buttonhole’s torn on his waistcoat. Unless he’s habitually an untidy man, I’d say his watch and chain were also snatched.”

“Seems to indicate a burglar, doesn’t it, sir?”

“Possibly. It was certainly a violent attack.” Murdoch got to his feet. “But where was he when he was hit? From the spray of blood across the top of the desk and the wall, I’d say he was sitting down when he was attacked. He was hit from behind and slightly to the side. He stood up, clutched the letter opener, turned to face his attacker, then fell backwards to the floor.”

Fyfer nodded. “The odd thing is he couldn’t have been taken by surprise, could he?”

“Why do you say that?”

“Look where the desk is in relation to the door. The attacker had to come right into the room in order to be behind him.”

He was right. “Let’s not jump to conclusions. Maybe he was asleep. He could have been having an afternoon nap.”

Fyfer’s eager look vanished. “Yes, sir, of course. I was getting carried away.”

“No, no, lad, what you say is quite plausible. Anyway, we’ll do a more thorough examination later. Right now we’d better see if we have a predator to flush out or not. My hunch is we don’t, that our murderer fled immediately, but we’ve got to have a look.”

Fyfer removed his revolver from the holster. “Do you want my gun, sir?”

“No thanks. It’s been a while since I was on the beat, I might be more of a liability than an asset. Give me your truncheon. And when I said *flush out* that’s what I meant. If the murderer is hiding somewhere in this church, you can bet he’s desperate. Let’s not have any unnecessary heroics.”

Fyfer’s flicked at his wide moustache. “I’d say between us we’d be his match. I’ve been in training all winter for the police games, same as you.”

“Bicyclist are you?”

“Yes, sir. And I know this isn’t the time to go into it, but I would dearly like to talk about your training schedule one of

these days. You got nipped at the wire last summer by Varley, but I'd wager you can beat him this year."

Murdoch stared at the constable for a moment. He was a good-looking fellow with clear blue eyes and the fresh complexion of an athlete. His uniform sat well on him.

"All right then, let's check the rooms in this area."

"The halls have all got a hemp floor covering, and I don't think they would hold any trace of footprints. I took a quick look before."

He was right again, but Murdoch said, "We'll do a thorough examination in daylight with more officers."

They walked across the hall to the room opposite. Murdoch leaned his ear against the door, then signalled to Fyfer to stand on one side of the threshold. He took the other. He couldn't hear any sound from the room so he turned the knob and flung the door open. Another pause, then he peered around the door frame. Nothing stirred and he motioned to the constable to follow him. The room was large and looked as if it served as the parish hall. Several rows of chairs faced a long table covered with a white cloth upon which were stacks of cups and saucers. A bank of windows at the far end gave sufficient light even at this time of day that he could see the place was empty and there was no other exit and no hiding places.

"I came here for a Boxing Day festivity," said Fyfer. "Chalmers Church has a long tradition of Christian charity. They invite all of the poor parishioners to come in for a meal at Christmastime."

Murdoch was startled. "Is this your church?"

"Oh no. I attend Sherbourne Methodist, but our churches have a cordial relationship and I had no family commitments that day so I thought I would help out."

"You knew Reverend Howard, then?"

"No. He only received his call to this ministry in January. The position was vacant for six months after the death of Reverend Cameron."

“You are an unexpected font of information, constable.”

He indicated to Fyfer that they should go back across the hall and try the room that adjoined the pastor's. According to a brass plate on the door, this office belonged to Reverend Swanzey. Murdoch went through the same procedure as before and thrust open the door. His heart gave a painful thump as his eye caught a dark shape standing in the corner. He actually raised the truncheon before he realized he was looking at a coat tree with a fedora hanging on it.

Fyfer grinned at him. “I almost put a bullet through it myself, sir.”

Murdoch looked around. This office was smaller than Reverend Howard's, with minimum furnishings: a rolltop desk and two plain chairs; a single bookcase against the wall. There was no wardrobe or cupboard. The fire was set in the grate but not lit and the curtains weren't drawn. Through the window, he could see the gardens, patched with snow and bedraggled and dreary in the encroaching night. There was a single lamp on the desk and Murdoch walked over to it and touched the globe. It was cold.

“Let's check the other hall,” he said to Fyfer.

This ran perpendicular to the one that led to Reverend Howard's office. To the left were two doors, one marked Water Closet, the other Storage. Murdoch proceeded with the same care and opened the first door to the water closet, which was surprisingly spacious with a small sink and one of the newer types of flushing toilets. There was a delicate flower motif in the bowl and a matching decoration in the sink.

Fyfer whistled softly. “I think the station would benefit from a toilet like this, don't you, sir?”

Murdoch agreed. The earth closet in the lower room of the station was noisome most of the time.

They moved on to the storage room. This proved to be crammed with the usual debris from a building used by the

public. A couple of broken chairs, a pile of hassocks in need of repair, a bin of assorted umbrellas, an open drawer filled with gloves, a coat stand loaded down with forgotten scarves, but empty of anyone hiding.

At the end of the hall was a door, the twin of the one by which he had originally entered. He pushed it open and a wave of damp, cold air blew in. A flight of steps led to the path that seemed to circumnavigate the building, but this side was lined by a high hedge, at the moment all bare branches except for a few withered leaves and bits of paper that had blown there over the winter. Beyond the hedge was the Horticultural Gardens, and he saw the lamplighter was starting to light the lamps along the pathways criss-crossing the park. Snow was drifting through the pools of light, but it wasn't yet sticking on the ground.

Murdoch turned back to Fyfer.

"Where is the church proper?"

"Through those doors, sir."

At either end of the hall were two closed doors.

"You take the first one, I'll take the second. Wait for me to give the signal."

A moment of attention, then they each flung a door open and entered the nave.

It was much bigger than he'd expected and in spite of the circumstances, Murdoch felt a twist of curiosity. Ever since he could remember, the priests had drilled into him the peril to his immortal soul of associating with any Church other than the true Faith and to his mind that carried over to the buildings themselves. Murdoch remembered his mother, on their way to mass, hurrying him, Bertie, and Susanna past the Protestant church in the village as if it would reach out a tentacle like a giant octopus and suck them in.

The tall windows here were plain glass, no glorious depictions of Christ and the saints, and in the dim light, he could just make out the high ceiling where the large gasolier hung. There was a balcony and in the nave, rows of plain,

straightbacked pews were arranged not as he was used to, perpendicular to a central aisle, but in semi-circles fanning out from the pulpit and divided by two aisles. There was not a wink of gold, no painted statues nor richly embroidered cloths to be seen. Instead of the sanctuary and the altar of his church, here was only a platform on which stood a pulpit reached by two curving sets of stairs on either side. So this was what a Protestant church looked like. Here the congregation presumably believed just as fervently in Jesus Christ and no doubt were as certain as any papist that they knew the truth, that they had the ear of God Almighty Himself.

He noticed that Fyfer was watching him from the other side of the church, waiting for further instructions, and he shifted his thoughts back to the investigation. The high backs of the pews would make this a great hiding place.

He called out. "I am a police officer. If there is anybody in here, show yourself in the name of the law or accept the consequences."

His voice echoed faintly in the empty church.

"Light your lantern, Fyfer. You can walk up on that side, I'll keep watch at the other end of the pews."

The constable obeyed and began to flash the light along the rows. As they walked, Murdoch realized that what was absent was the familiar smell he associated with God, the sharp, acrid whiff of incense. There was just the odour of wax polish, gaslights, and a faint dank smell, but he assumed that was from the winter clothes of the congregation.

Nobody flew out at them and by now, Murdoch was sure they weren't going to find anyone. Nevertheless, they went up to the balcony, searched up there, then returned to the main floor.

"The problem is there are several possible points of entry, wouldn't you say, sir? Two side doors, one quite hidden from

view, a rear door that comes in from the park, and the two Jarvis Street main entrances into the church.”

“Thank you, Fyfer, I had worked that out myself.”

“Yes, sir.”

Murdoch immediately felt a pang of guilt at his own curtness. Who was he to suppress eagerness and initiative in a young officer?

“I see they have a gasolier in here. We’ll have to get somebody to light it and we’ll give everything a thorough going-over.”

“I know how to light it, sir. The ladder is kept behind the pulpit.”

Murdoch shook his head. “Leave it for now. We can’t do anything further until the doctor has made a formal pronouncement of death. We’ll have to swear in a jury and Crabtree will need you. I’ll go and talk to the woman who found the body. What was her name again?”

“Miss Sarah Dignam. She was dreadful upset. She’s a spinster lady.”

Murdoch thought any woman would have been shocked by her discovery, but he assumed Fyfer was informing him Miss Dignam was no longer young or marriageable. Whatever she was, he wasn’t looking forward to the prospect of interviewing her.

Chapter Three

AT THAT MOMENT, THEY HEARD the north side door open and a woman entered. Murdoch frowned, about to usher her out again, expecting to have to deal with the hysterics of an unwary parishioner when she smiled politely.

“Good afternoon, I’m Dr. Julia Ogden. I am here to act as coroner.”

Murdoch recovered quickly. “Yes, ma’am.”

“Where is the body I’m to examine?”

“In here, ma’am ... Fyfer, go and report to Constable Crabtree.”

The doctor looked at the young man in surprise. “Hello, Frank. I didn’t expect to see you here.”

“Good afternoon, Dr. Ogden. The church is on my beat. Er, this is Detective Murdoch.”

She offered her hand. “Why is your name familiar?”

“We met last summer, I believe. That is, not met exactly, we spoke on the telephone because you performed a post-mortem examination for us.”

“Ah, yes, I remember.”

Murdoch wasn’t sure she really did. He recalled speculating at the time about what the good doctor looked like, as her voice was youthful, English in intonation. She was older than he’d expected, almost of middle age, tall and thin with greying hair. She was wearing a black mackintosh cloak and she reminded him of a nun who’d taught him when he was in standard two. Sister Regina had the same air of unshakeable composure and competence. He’d found her most intimidating.

“I’ll report to Constable Crabtree,” said Fyfer and he left.

"I know his family," Dr. Ogden said to Murdoch. "He's a very fine young man. The police force is lucky to have him."

"So I am learning, ma'am. This way, please."

He indicated the pastor's office and opened the door. She stood in the doorway and regarded the dead man. Her expression changed and her hand flew to her mouth. Her composure was not so unshakeable after all.

"Oh dear me, it's Charles Howard. I wasn't told anything except that somebody had died. I never dreamed it would be him. I thought ... Oh my goodness ... excuse me, detective, I ..."

She stopped, struggling for control.

"You knew him, ma'am?"

"His wife is one of my patients. This is quite, quite dreadful. What happened? Who did this?"

"I'm afraid we don't know as yet. One of the parishioners found his body hardly more than half an hour ago and I've just been called in."

Murdoch waited a moment to see what she was going to do. She breathed deeply and braced herself. Control was back.

"Do you want to examine the body now, ma'am?"

"Yes, of course."

She had her medical bag with her and she placed it on the floor. She unfastened her cloak, removed it, and put it carefully on top of the bag. Then she pulled off her gloves and, with a steady hand, reached forward to touch the minister's forehead. Murdoch knew that sort of discipline. Sister Regina would have stared down the devil himself if she thought it was her duty.

"He is barely cold. Death has occurred within the last two hours." Without looking at Murdoch, she said, "I have to remove the dagger."

She leaned over the body, put her left hand on Howard's shoulder, and with her right grasped the handle. With strength worthy of a teamster, she gave a jerk, and with a

soft, gulping sound the weapon came out, the blood seeping over her fingers.

"That was in quite deep." She held out the thing to Murdoch. It was about nine inches long, of brass or gold, the handle carved in the shape of a serpent, with leaves and tendrils curling about the blade. "It looks like a letter opener."

He took it from her and wrapped it in his own handkerchief. He would examine it later to see if it had any more to tell them. She looked at the pastor's hands. "There are no cuts on his fingers."

"I believe the blood on his hands is from him trying to pull out the letter opener, ma'am."

"Ah yes, good thinking. He would try to do that, of course."

"Would he have died instantly?"

"Quickly, but not necessarily instantly. But those wounds to his head look very severe. They probably finished the job."

"I think he was kicked while he was on the floor."

She nodded. "It appears that way. Two or three times, I'd say, but I can confirm that when I do the post-mortem examination." She sat back on her heels. "Who would do such a thing? Charles Howard was such a kind, friendly man. I cannot believe he would have an enemy in the world."

"It's likely it was a thief. His boots have been pulled off and his watch and chain appear to be missing, but we'll have to confirm that with his wife."

Again there was a crack in the doctor's composure. "Poor, poor Louisa. Does she know?"

"I don't believe so, ma'am."

"She won't take it well. She is of a most highly strung disposition."

Rather stiffly, she got to her feet. "You'd better start to summon a jury, detective. In the meantime, I will deliver the news to Mrs. Howard."

"I would prefer to be present when you tell her, ma'am."

Not that he relished witnessing the inevitable shock and grief the woman was going to experience, but this was a murder case and at the moment, nobody was excluded as a suspect.

Dr. Ogden regarded him frostily. "It would be far better if I were alone. She will probably need a sedative as it is. And you are a stranger to her, are you not?"

"We have never met and I have no desire to add to her distress, but I am investigating a murder."

"Good Lord, detective, surely you aren't implying Louisa Howard had anything to do with her husband's death?"

"I'm not implying anything, ma'am, but at this time, all possibilities are on the table."

They eyed each other, trying to assess the extent of the other's stubbornness. It was Murdoch who backed down. Calm and controlled on the surface, Dr. Ogden had a core as stiff and unyielding as a whalebone corset – which she probably didn't need to wear, he thought uncharitably.

"Perhaps you could go ahead, ma'am, and I will follow in about a half an hour. As you say, my presence may be too hard on her."

"Very well. After she is settled, I will return and instruct the jurors." She picked up her medical bag. "You had better have a constable stand guard here and perhaps you should go to talk to the woman who discovered the body."

"I was intending to do that."

His voice must have been sharper than he realized because, unexpectedly, she turned rather pink. "I beg your pardon. Telling people what to do is an occupational hazard with doctors."

He liked her better for her discomfiture and smiled. She went to the door.

"I should go at once. Louisa mustn't hear the news from anyone else, least of all prurient neighbours. You will follow me then?"

Murdoch almost answered, "Yes, Sister," but caught himself in time.

After she left, he stood for a minute in the doorway of the office. He wanted to get a sense of the man who'd used it.

It was a spacious room, the furnishings simple but pleasant and comfortable looking, not as austere as he had imagined a Presbyterian minister's office would be.

Opposite the door, a marble fireplace dominated the wall and the fire was lit and well drawn. Two floor-to-ceiling, glass-fronted bookcases, the books sober and neat as a library's, flanked the fireplace. Close to the brass fender was a brown leather armchair and across from it a straightbacked wooden chair. Lined up along the wall to the left of the door were half a dozen identical chairs. Above these hung some oil paintings, all of them still-lives of fruit and flowers. The floor covering was a pale blue wool rug, well worn.

He went over to the armchair. Beside it was a small table on which was an open book placed spine up. It turned out to be a book of sermons by a Reverend J.T. Lanceley, volume one. Tucked into one of the pages was an envelope and inside it was a catalogue from a supplier of church goods. It looked as if Howard had sat in his chair, opened the envelope with his letter opener, then put the pamphlet in the book. If he had put the letter opener on the table, as was most likely, it would corroborate that in order to get hold of the weapon, his assailant had come right into the room. The single wooden chair was out of place from the others. Was this its normal position or did it indicate Howard had company?

Murdoch turned to the curtained window. If the pastor had been killed two hours ago, it was early to close the curtains, but perhaps it was because the day had been so dull and dreary. He drew one aside. Reverend Howard hadn't had a good view. His window overlooked the side path and the tall hedge that ran around the property.

Murdoch returned to the blood-spattered desk. Constable Fyfer was astute in his observation. Whoever Howard had allowed in was somebody he knew or, at least, somebody he saw no reason to fear because at some point he had turned his back as he sat at his desk. Unless of course he was asleep, but somehow Murdoch doubted that.

There were no signs of a struggle. The attack had been swift and unexpected. He'd noticed that Reverend Howard's index finger was ink-stained, just as Murdoch's was. He'd been writing something and he had been using the pen recently. Yes, there it was beside the blotter, but there was no paper or letter to be seen. A sheaf of unused notepaper and envelopes was neatly stacked in a tray. Murdoch checked the wastebasket beside the desk, but it was empty. On the floor was a briefcase made of gutta percha, labelled PERSONAL PORTFOLIO . It was untied and inside were cardboard pockets sorted alphabetically and stuffed with papers. He closed the case. He'd take it back to the station with him later.

Howard had been a tidy man and the top of his desk was clear except for the brass lamp, the tray of notepaper, and a photograph in a silver frame. It was a studio portrait of him as a youthful-looking pastor with a pretty young woman on his arm. They were both dressed in formal attire. She was wearing a wide-brimmed hat with ostrich feathers and holding a bouquet of cascading flowers. Murdoch assumed this was their wedding picture. They were solemn and unsmiling as one had to be for photographs ten years ago, but even so, they seemed happy to be together.

He looked down at the dead body. Even with the dreadful disfiguring injuries, it was obvious he had been an attractive man.

He made the sign of the cross.

"May the Lord have mercy on his soul."

He wasn't sure how a Presbyterian minister would take to being blessed by a papist, but he hoped doctrinal differences weren't important when you were dead.

Chapter Four

MURDOCH WAS ADMITTED into the house by a young, frightened-looking maid.

"I'm Detective Murdoch. Is the doctor with your mistress?"

"Yes, sir. They're in the drawing room."

Even in the hall, he could hear the sound of anguished weeping. "Would you announce me. Just speak quietly to the doctor."

"Yes, sir."

She disappeared through the chenille *portière* of the drawing room, and Murdoch began to pace up and down slowly. He tried to concentrate on one of the paintings on the wall, a fierce biblical scene of Abraham about to sacrifice Isaac. It was a story that Murdoch had never liked, as blind obedience was not his idea of virtue regardless of whether you believed the order was from God. The crying stopped abruptly and the maid emerged followed by Dr. Ogden, whose face was stiff with strain.

"You can speak to her now, Mr. Murdoch, but not for long. Please ask only the most pertinent of questions."

She stood aside to let him enter, then followed him into a small dark room, its furnishings heavy and sombre. Mrs. Howard was seated on the sofa, a hoop of needlework beside her. What jolted him was that the informal silk tea gown she was wearing revealed she was *enceinte*, perhaps six months.

"Louisa, this is Detective Murdoch. He needs to ask you some questions. Can you do your best?"

The other woman managed to nod. She had fine reddish-brown hair and was probably normally fair-skinned, but now

her face was blotched with red, her eyes already shadowed.

Without being asked, Murdoch sat down on the nearest chair across from her. He felt he was less intimidating that way. Dr. Ogden took the chair to his right.

"Mrs. Howard, please accept my deepest condolences. I would not trouble you at a time like this, but I want to find the man who is responsible for this crime and I need to act promptly."

He had taken out his pen and notebook when he was in the hall and he kept them discreetly at his side.

"First of all, will you tell me when you last saw your husband?"

She could barely manage a whisper and he had to lean forward to hear her.

"We had our luncheon together as we usually do. He left just before one o'clock. Tuesday is his day to be in his office." She licked her lips. "Could I have some water?"

Dr. Ogden immediately stood up and tugged the bell pull beside the fireplace.

Murdoch resumed. "Was it common knowledge that your husband would be in his office at that time?"

"I assume it was. He was there on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. The other afternoons, he made calls in the parish." She broke off. "My husband was one of Christ's most diligent servants, Mr. Murdoch. Who would do such a thing to him?" There was a rising note of hysteria in her voice. The doctor came over to her and laid a hand on her head.

"Louisa, calm yourself."

There was a tap at the door and Dr. Ogden went to answer it.

After a short, whispered conversation, she closed the door and returned to Mrs. Howard.

"Doris says that Mr. Drummond is here. He would like to speak to you. Do you want to receive him?"

Louisa had been slumped against the back of the sofa, but she suddenly sat upright.

"No, I will not. How dare he come here!"

"I'm sure he wishes to express his condolences, my dear," said the doctor soothingly.

"He does not. He wishes to gloat." Louisa was virtually shouting.

Dr. Ogden pursed her lips. She turned to Murdoch.

"As you can see, Mrs. Howard is in no condition to be interviewed. I must administer a sedative and perhaps you should return to the church."

"Of course." He picked up his notebook. "One more question, if you please. Mrs. Howard, was your husband in the habit of wearing a pocket watch?"

"Yes, he had a lovely silver engraved one that had belonged to his father. Why do you ask? Has it gone?"

"It appears to have been snatched from his waistcoat."

Louisa abruptly got to her feet. "I want to see him. I want to see Charles," she said to the doctor.

"Absolutely not. I cannot allow it."

To Murdoch's distress, the widow turned to him. "You are the detective in charge. Surely it is up to you. It is my right to see my own husband."

"That is true, Mrs. Howard, but I do not recommend it. Better to remember him as he was."

But he regretted the words even as they left his mouth. Her imagination was going to paint the picture now. She was going to fill in what he hadn't said.

"I'm sorry," he said. But he knew whatever she might imagine had happened could not possibly be as shocking as the actual thing.

"Louisa, you really must ..." At that moment they heard voices outside in the hall.

"I have sent for some of the women to be with you. I have to return to the church."

Mrs. Howard caught the doctor by the hand. "How shall I tell the children?"

"You won't tell them anything for now. When I have finished my duties I will come back and deal with it for you."

"Who is here?"

"The Misses Frobishers and Mrs. Watson."

"Not Miss Dignam. I will not see her. Nor Miss Flowers."

"No, not them. Just the ones I mentioned."

Just then, they heard the sound of the door knocker, followed almost immediately by a man's voice, raised and excited. The door opened and a man burst in, Doris following helplessly behind him.

"Mrs. Howard, my dear lady -" He halted when he saw Murdoch and Dr. Ogden. "I beg your pardon. I was just at the church and heard the news. I had to come and see you."

"This is Reverend Swanzey," said Louisa. "Dr. Ogden and Detective Murdoch."

Swanzey hovered awkwardly by the door. "Have you arrested the culprit yet?"

"Not yet, sir."

"Do we know what happened?"

"Mr. Murdoch says that Charles's watch has been stolen."

"Ah, a burglar then, I thought it must be that."

"Why so, sir?" Murdoch asked. He'd kept his voice neutral, but Swanzey flinched.

"Charles Howard didn't have an enemy in the world. He was truly a vicar of Christ on earth."

His words made the new widow weep once more, exhausted, almost tearless crying that was painful to see. Dr. Ogden went and sat beside her.

"I have asked some of the women from the parish to stay with Mrs. Howard," she said, her tone making it clear this was no place for men. Swanzey promptly edged toward the door. He was a tall, gangly man of middle age with a lantern jaw and bristling side whiskers. The wind had reddened his

cheeks and nose in an unattractive way. His awkwardness was not soothing.

"Of course. I don't wish to intrude, but I couldn't, er. I couldn't not come." He turned to Mrs. Howard and gave her a quick bow. "I will call tomorrow. If there is anything at all I can do, please send for me."

She gave him a wan smile. "Thank you, that is very kind." She began to stroke her distended stomach in an unconscious search of comfort. Murdoch noticed the embroidery she had been working on was a nursery sampler.

Swanzey bowed again to Murdoch. "Good day, sir. I will make myself available at any time if you need to speak to me."

He backed out of the room, and Dr. Ogden exchanged a look with Murdoch. It was time for him to leave as well.

"Mrs. Howard, I will have to come back at a later time. Again please accept my sincerest sympathy."

She nodded and turned her head away. He was now the enemy.

Out in the hall, Murdoch tipped his hat to the three women who were standing there. Older, respectable women whose faces reflected the shock and sorrow of what they had heard, they were here to offer support to the new widow. He wondered how many times through the centuries women had come in such a way to comfort their bereaved sisters.

Chapter Five

MURDOCH RETURNED TO THE CHURCH . In spite of the increasingly heavy snow, a large crowd had gathered; people quietly talking among themselves, waiting to see the body removed. The police ambulance was drawn up in front of the steps, the horses jingling their harnesses and snorting from time to time. Fyfer and Crabtree had done a good job and quickly assembled the “good men and true,” who would be jurors at the inquest. They were all standing at the top of the steps by the doors. Because the church was located in a well-to-do area of the city, they were better dressed than most jurors Murdoch had seen in the past and they didn’t seem to be grumbling about being subpoenaed and losing a day or two of work. The constable was informing them of their duties in his loud, unmistakable voice. It was the juror’s duty to view the body and the scene where the crime had taken place. When the inquest was conducted, they were expected to offer an informed opinion about what had taken place and, if appropriate, point an accusing finger at the one they considered the guilty party.

Murdoch leaned his wheel against a tree and went up to talk to him. “How are things going, George?”

“I just need one more to make the twelve, sir ... Ah, you over there.” He called out to a man in a tweed ulster who had just joined the crowd. “Come over here.”

The man shook his head, “Not me.”

Some of the onlookers, mostly women by now, giggled at his defiance, but Crabtree was on him in a minute.

“I need one more juror, mister, and you’d better give me a very good reason why I shouldn’t subpoena you.”

"I'm a businessman, I can no afford to lose time away from my shop."

He was an older man with a pinched, craggy face and a full, grey-streaked beard. He spoke with a strong Scottish accent.

"That's not good enough. It's your civic duty same as the other men up there. I'm going to subpoena you."

"I've already helped the police once today to do their job, I dinna think I should do more."

"What do you mean, helped the police?"

"He was the gentleman who took care of the lady for me while I went into the church," interjected Fyfer. "Mr. Drummond, isn't it?"

"Ay."

Fortunately for Drummond, another man, a young, smartly dressed fellow who heard this, put up his hand as if he was in school.

"Excuse me, officer. I'll be glad to serve."

"Can you read and write?"

"Yes, sir. I got to the sixth standard."

"I don't need your school record, just your name. All right, come up here. But, Mr. Drummond, we can always do with extra jurors. I'm going to subpoena you anyway. You can get somebody to mind the store for you."

"I've already been closed down for the past two hours. I'll be pauperized."

But Crabtree was a stickler for civic duty and he hated dodgers. He began to write out the subpoena and, reluctantly, Drummond climbed the steps and took it.

"Good," said Crabtree, "that'll do us. Now listen, you men. First off you need to elect a foreman, then we view the body, I will administer an oath. Are there any Jews among you?"

There was a general shaking of heads. "I need to know because that's a different oath, but it makes my job easier if you're all Christian. Now then. Who's going to be foreman?"

Nobody stirred. "Chamberlin, you've been on a jury before, why don't you do it?" Crabtree spoke to an elderly man who was sporting an impressively long white beard. "Any objections? No, then that's resolved. Mr. Chamberlin is your foreman and he will take the oath on behalf of all of you when we get inside."

The men shuffled their feet and a couple of them shook hands with Chamberlin. Murdoch tapped Drummond on the shoulder.

"I'm Detective Murdoch. I was just about to go and talk to Miss Dignam. How is she?"

The Scotsman eyed him mistrustfully, but Murdoch was beginning to think this was his habitual expression.

"She's got the look of wet clay about her, but she'll live I'm sure."

Just then Dr. Ogden arrived and, without wasting time, ordered the men to follow her. She went down the path, the jurors trailing after her like courtiers. Crabtree and Murdoch went with them.

They crowded into the hall and Crabtree directed them into the study until they were standing around the body. The sight of the corpse sobered even the enthusiastic young volunteer, but the constable didn't give them a chance to become maudlin.

"Listen up and hearken to your foreman's oath." He faced Mr. Chamberlin. "You shall diligently inquire and true presentment make of all such matters and things as shall be here given you in charge, on behalf of our Sovereign Lady, the Queen, touching the death of Charles Howard now lying dead, of whose body you shall have the view; you shall present no man for hatred, malice or ill-will, nor spare any through fear, favour, or affection; but a true verdict give according to the evidence and the best of your skill and knowledge. So help you God. Do you so swear?"

"I do."

Crabtree addressed the remaining men. "The same oath that James Chamberlin, your foreman, hath now taken before you on his part, you and each of you are several well and truly to observe and keep on your parts. So help you God."

A spatter of *amens* from the less worldly of the men, then Dr. Ogden took over and began to describe what had happened to Howard. Her terminology was clinical, but no language could bleach the horror from the description. Midway through, Murdoch was afraid he might lose some of the jurors. He sent the young man of sixth-standard accomplishment out to get some fresh air. Fortunately, the process didn't take long and there were no questions.

"The inquest will be two days from now, March 5 at eleven in the morning at the Humphrey Funeral Home," said Dr. Ogden. "The constable will inform you where it is and what you should do when you get there." She nodded at Murdoch. "You can have the body taken away now. I will perform the post-mortem examination tomorrow."

The jurors talked among themselves briefly before leaving. At least half of them seemed to have known Howard, and Murdoch was struck with the genuine dismay they expressed.

Dr. Ogden said she was going back to the manse and Murdoch returned to the front of the church.

"George, start the rounds. See if anybody heard anything, saw anything, the usual procedure."

"Can I assist, sir?" asked Fyfer.

Murdoch hesitated. "Somebody has to stand here." But he knew from experience how dull it was to be assigned that task and Fyfer was looking at him like an eager pup. Two other constables had been sent up from the station and were waiting for orders. "All right. Start with questioning those who're hanging around. Just get names and addresses for now. If they have anything to say unsolicited, make a

note of it, but tell them we'll be coming to interview them as soon as we can."

"Ugly business, isn't it, sir?" said Crabtree. "A man ripped from his family like that. And a decent man by all accounts. The inspector is going to be on our backs about this one, sir. If I may take the liberty of putting it that way."

"Indeed you may, George. The exact thought had crossed my mind. The deceased was a pastor of the Presbyterian Church. Inspector Brackenreid is always consistent in these matters. If you were important in life, you will be as important in death. Privilege doesn't vanish at the Great Divide."

Murdoch mounted his bicycle. He had discarded his muffler and gloves a few days earlier, hoping this would encourage spring to come. It hadn't. He turned up his collar and pulled his sleeves down as far as they would go over his hands.

"Anyway, I'm off to talk to Miss Dignam now."

"I gave you the address, didn't I, sir?" said Fyfer.

"Yes. Thank you, constable."

"Good luck, sir. I consider you have the worst job of all."

Murdoch was inclined to agree with him.

Fyfer had given Miss Dignam's address as 420 , just north of the church on the west side of Jarvis Street. The house was impossible to miss as it was blazing with lights. As Murdoch approached, he saw a man and a woman turning away from the front door. Another couple was waiting for them on the sidewalk and he heard, "won't see us ..." Some of the people who had gathered at the church seemed to be here, and there were three or four clumps of people standing on the street. They watched intently as Murdoch opened the wrought-iron gate and walked up to the front door. He didn't even have time to knock before it was opened. A wizened little man, in the formal clothes of a servant, frowned at him.

“Miss Dignam is not receiving callers, sir.”

He handed the butler his card. “Detective William Murdoch. I must speak to her.”

The little man’s attitude changed. “Thank goodness. She has been waiting for you. We’ve already been swamped with neighbours and such who want to see her. Not that they were stomping down the weeds before, I’ll have you know. But now, suddenly she’s the belle of the ball, the toast of the town. Poor dear thing.”

For a moment, Murdoch wondered if indeed he was speaking to a servant.

“And you are?”

“Walters. I’m the general dogsbody here and have been since Miss Sarah was in short skirts. My actual job is valet to Mr. Elias Dignam, but there’s just me here now so we don’t stand on ceremony.”

He stepped back into the hall. “Come on in before you get gawked to death. Miss Sarah is in the parlour. Her friend Miss Flowers is with her, but Mr. Dignam is in his study. Will you be wanting to talk to him?”

“I’m not sure just yet, Walters. Let me start with Miss Dignam.”

The valet-cum-butler led the way down the hall, which gave the impression of having seen better days. The red flocked wall covering was dingy and the one rug on the floor should have been long ago relegated to the attic by the look of it. Walters seemed to pick up his thoughts.

“We aren’t grand here, Mr. Murdoch. Mind you, we used to be when Mr. Dignam Senior was alive. Five servants then, and company all the time. But he lost all his money in a foolish investment in America and the two children were left with almost nothing.”

Murdoch thought that the old servant was probably as loyal as he was indiscreet.

“Here we are. I’ll bring in some tea.”

There were no *portières* , so Walters tapped lightly on the door and, without waiting for permission, he went in.

"I've got a Detective Murdoch here to see you, Miss Sarah."

The parlour Murdoch stepped into was almost completely dark. Most of the light was coming from the blazing fire in the grate. Only one lamp was lit, and it was turned down low. He could just make out a smallish room crammed with furniture. Close to the fire were two shadowy figures. One of them stood up and came toward him.

"Good evening, I'm Miss Flowers, a dear friend of Miss Dignam," she said in a breathy voice. "As you of course realize she has had a most dreadful shock, but she has expressed a desire to speak to the police, which is why we have permitted you to come in."

Miss Flowers seemed to be trying to live up to her name. Past mid-age, she was short and stout but not deterred by her own physique. She was wearing an afternoon dress whose full skirt of heavy green satin was lavishly appliquéd with white daisies and roses. She was rather like a walking meadow. Her hair, although abundant and loosely pinned, was more grey than brown. She wore a pair of gold pince-nez.

The other woman had not stirred from her seat by the fire. Miss Flowers grasped Murdoch's arm and stepped forward. They were only three paces from the fireplace, but she said in a loud voice, "Sarah, my dearest, I have a Mr. Murdoch here from the police. He wishes to speak to you."

Finally, the other woman turned around and Murdoch saw that all the overdone solicitude on the part of her friend was justified. Even in the dim light, he saw the grief in the woman's face. Miss Sarah Dignam was suffering more than shock and horror at what she had found. She was also experiencing profound loss.

Chapter Six

IN CONTRAST TO HER FRIEND , Miss Dignam was wearing an unadorned dress of navy wool, extremely plain with old-fashioned tight sleeves. The only jewellery was a silver pendant watch. Murdoch thought he was in the presence of yet another nunlike woman, although Miss Dignam was too distraught to command much authority and he doubted that even in her normal days she would do so. She was small in stature, slight and bony, her skin suggesting that she had been drying up for a long time. However, as she offered her hand in greeting and managed a ghost of a smile, he saw that she had fine blue eyes that in her youth must have brought her many compliments.

"I am sorry to have to speak to you at this time, Miss Dignam, but I am sure you can appreciate the necessity for the police to pursue the matter of Mr. Howard's death as soon as possible."

"Of course. I expected you." Her voice was soft but not without crispness. She looked at her friend. "May, I believe it would be better for me to speak to the detective alone."

For a moment, Miss Flowers looked as if she would flat-out refuse to leave, more from prurient curiosity, Murdoch thought, than genuine concern for her friend. But rather surprisingly, Miss Dignam stood up, went over to the door, and opened it.

"Perhaps you would be so good as to look in on Elias. He's quite upset at the news and does so need cheering up. And would you tell Walters to wait on serving us tea until I ring. Thank you, May, I am much obliged."

"As you wish, my dear." With something of a pout, Miss Flowers swept off with a rustle of taffeta. Miss Dignam returned to her seat by the fire.

"Please sit down, Mr. Murdoch."

Her manners were those of a woman of polite society, but Murdoch had the impression she was barely keeping other, more passionate feelings in check. He took the chair opposite, put his hat on the floor, and removed his notebook from his pocket.

"Miss Dignam, I will have to write some notes. Do you mind if I turn up the lamp?"

"Not at all. I cannot sit in darkness for the rest of my life, can I?"

An odd remark, he thought, but he turned up the wick of the lamp and took out his fountain pen.

"Will you tell me what happened, Miss Dignam? Please don't hurry. Any details that you remember no matter how trivial may be of great importance so I do ask you to include them."

She stared at him blankly as if the word *trivial* had no place in her universe any more. There was no longer anything associated with the death of Reverend Howard that could be described in that way.

"Will you tell me exactly what happened this afternoon?" he repeated gently.

She shifted away from him so that she was staring into the fire. "In a way, there isn't much to tell. Tuesday is the afternoon when the study group meets. We discuss a biblical text that Reverend Howard assigns us - I should say, assigned us."

"And what was the text for this week, ma'am?"

Murdoch doubted if he really needed to know this, but he found working around the edges of the significant issue sometimes made his witnesses reveal unguarded things.

She glanced over at him nervously. "We have been studying the Song of Songs."

"Ah yes, a magnificent piece."

"Yes, indeed it is." She seemed to vanish again into some interior world of her own.

"What time did you arrive at the church, ma'am?"

Another nervous glance. "I, er, I went a little earlier, it was my turn to provide refreshment and I had a seed cake, caraway seed." She paused. "Reverend Howard was quite partial to my caraway seed cake."

She turned her head away and wiped at her eyes. Her shoulders shuddered and Murdoch was afraid she wouldn't be able to continue. He waited. Finally, she regained control and turned back to face him.

"I do apologize, Mr. Murdoch, but my eyes are burning dreadfully. Would you mind if I put the lamp in a different place?"

"Of course. Allow me."

Murdoch shifted the lamp to the table behind him and lowered the wick. Miss Dignam's face was more shadowed now. She folded her hands in her lap.

"I beg your pardon, I was distracted. As I said, I went to the church early. Our group meets at four o'clock and I must have been there at half past three."

Another pause. She was coming to the centre of the horror now. "I went in through the front door and walked down to the pastor's office, which is at the rear of the church."

"Did you notice anything amiss in the church itself, Miss Dignam?"

"Nothing. It has been a gloomy day and it was rather dark in there, but no, I saw nothing out of place."

"Do you usually enter by the front doors, ma'am?"

"Yes. Is that important?"

"I merely wondered if you had tried to go in by the side door and found it locked."

"No, I, er ... I like to go in to the church so I can offer a short prayer before our meeting."

"And is that what you did today?"

Another sharp glance. "Is that relevant, detective?"

"It may be. I'm trying to get an accurate time sequence."

"Of course, I'm sorry. No, I did not stop to pray. I had taken a little longer than usual and I didn't want to be late so I went directly to the office."

Murdoch braced himself for the breakdown he anticipated would occur when she had to put into words what she had seen, but Miss Dignam simply clasped her hands even more tightly together and said in a voice that had gone as bloodless and light as an autumn leaf, "The door was open and I could see Charles lying on his back on the floor. There was blood everywhere ..."

"Did you go into the room?"

"Of course. I had to make sure he was indeed dead and that there was nothing I could do."

"That was very brave of you, ma'am."

"Was it? I don't see it as an act of courage. If there were the slightest possibility he was still alive, I would have -" She stopped, but once again Murdoch had an eerie sense he was talking to one of the nuns he had known. Miss Dignam would have walked through fire if need be. "I could see that the injuries he had sustained were very severe. I had to leave him and I ran to fetch help. By good fortune, I encountered a constable on his beat right outside the church and directed him to the office ... do I need to continue, Mr. Murdoch?"

"Just one or two more questions, Miss Dignam. Did you touch the body at all when you went into the room?"

"No."

"The constable said that your face and hands were quite bloodied and that you had blood on your cloak."

"Then I must have ... it's all so dreamlike, frankly. But, yes, perhaps I did touch him, to see if there was any possibility that he was alive."

"Did you touch anything else, either on his person or in the room itself?"

Her reply was quick. "No, of course not. I had no occasion to."

"Did you hear anything at all when you went into the church? Footsteps, for instance? A door closing? That sort of thing."

"No, I did not. I have had some time to think about the matter. I realize Charles, er, Reverend Howard must have been killed very shortly before I arrived, but I had no awareness of anyone either in the church or the hallway."

"You said the church was dark. The pews are all tall. It would be easy for somebody to hide there, would it not?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

Murdoch made a note. "Did the minister have any enemies that you are aware of, Miss Dignam?"

Even in the shadowy light, he could see how much that question upset her.

"Absolutely not. Charles Howard was a truly good man. His eyes were as the eyes of doves, by the rivers of waters, his lips fitly set and terrible as an army with banners."

Murdoch barely had time to register that she was quoting from the Song of Songs when she suddenly gulped in air and began to gasp, fighting for breath. She was shaken by uncontrollable sobs that were virtually soundless and the more pitiful for it. He got to his feet, not sure how to help her, and gently touched her shoulder.

"You've had a terrible shock, ma'am. Shall I fetch Miss Flowers?"

With a tremendous effort of will she made herself stop crying. "No, I would prefer to be alone." She managed to suppress another shudder. "Would you be so kind as to hand me my bible, which is on the sideboard. I will take the word of our Lord as my comfort."

He did so but she didn't open the book immediately, waiting for him to leave.

"If you think of anything else at all, please send for me, Miss Dignam. I am at number four station on Parliament at

Wilton Street.”

“Yes, I will do that. Can you let yourself out?”

He left her, wondering if he should send in the friend regardless. He didn’t need to worry. As soon as he closed the door behind him, the kitchen door opened and Miss Flowers popped her head out.

“Have you finished?”

“For now.”

“I’ll go into her.”

“She said she wanted to be by herself for a little while.”

“Nonsense. Right now, she doesn’t know what she wants.”

And she swept down the hall and into the drawing room.

Murdoch let himself out of the front door. As he cycled away from the house, he was struck by a memory that had haunted him for years. “Monk” Brodie and his dog. What was the mongrel’s name? Ah yes, Paddy. A mangy stray that Brodie had adopted. Murdoch doubted if he would ever forget what had happened that cold winter night when the little dog had gone missing.

He leaned his wheel against the station wall. Why was he remembering that now?

Chapter Seven

THE DAY HAD BEEN more like November than March, as almost every customer had remarked to the cabbie, who had pulled his muffler up around his face for protection. His latest fare, a man in a hurry to get to Union Station, had asked him to whip up the horse, twenty-five cents extra if he made his train on time. Later, trying to tell his wife what had happened, the cabbie, Mick O'Leary, admitted that he hadn't seen the child's hoop as it came rolling across the road in front of him until it was too late.

"Where's there a hoop, Lal, there will a boy surely follow, but that lad dashed like a devil out of the other place, right into me path. I pulled up Jeb as smart as I could, but we was already out on the canter. He reared in the shafts so I afeared he might break the leads and bolt. Then this woman let out the most God-awful scream I ever did hear. *Timmy!* Or maybe it was *Tommy!* I don't know. Then the man I'd picked up, who in my mind is the one responsible, so help me God, this fellow leaned his head out of the window and yells, 'Stop. You've run over a child. Stop at once.' Which he didn't need to shout because that's what I'd already done. We was right outside the Golden Lion and of course all the customers were just coming in or out. There was two or three other coachmen outside waiting for their missus, but do you think they'd so much as step down to give a fellow a hand? Not them. All of them, three it was now I think, all of them sat like they was Lot's wife. 'Course, I jumped down right smart to see the worst. The woman, who it turned out was the boy's ma, was on her knees trying to see

underneath the carriage. My fare had got out too and he was down there looking.

“I can tell you, Lal, those were some of the worst moments in my life. I could see this lad lying still as a dead cat. There was blood coming out of his mouth and I swear I didn’t know as he was quick or dead. I said a Hail Mary I can tell you. ‘Move your carriage forward, but don’t deviate an inch to either side,’ said the fare, who was a bossy sort of cove. So I got Jeb’s bridle and walked him on. He was a trembling poor beast, what with the pulling up that had torn his mouth and this woman carrying on to wake the dead, which we all thought she might need to do. But there was quite a crowd gathering now, and I heard somebody say, ‘Look, his eyes are fluttering. He’s alive.’ The woman tried to pick him up, but Mr. Bossy stopped her and lifted the lad himself. ‘We need to lie him down somewhere,’ he says. And wouldn’t you know, one of the la-di-das said, ‘Bring him into the shop. There’s a couch.’ That was noble of her, seeing as how the lad was bleeding and covered with mud and some horse plop. I could tell as soon as I saw the look on that clerk’s face that he wasn’t too pleased with the idea. But no, she had to be a good Samaritan. Wasn’t going to cost her anything if he ruined the furniture. She had a walking stick with a silver head and she waved it in front of her, like Moses at the Red Sea, no I’m not blaspheming, that’s how she did it.” He demonstrated to make his wife laugh. “Well, everybody moved aside and the man carried the lad into the store. I tied up Jeb and followed quick as I could. ‘Give him air,’ says Mrs. La-di-Da. So Mr. Bossy – they deserved each other, in my opinion – laid the boy on the velvet couch. And it *was* velvet, blue velvet. I wager it hadn’t seen so much filth in all its born days. And all this time, you understand, the mother is sobbing and carrying on that she can’t lose him too. Not so soon. Then I paid attention to the fact that she was in mourning. Mr. Bossy tries to calm her down.

“‘He’s not dead, madam. Look, Tommy, or Timmy,’ whatever it was, ‘open your eyes.’ And the lad did, which made his mother scream more than if he’d died on the spot.

“‘What happened?’ asks one old geezer and I knew I was going to get it in the neck. I just knew it the way Mr. Bossy glared up at me. ‘It was your fault,’ he says. ‘You were driving recklessly.’ As if it weren’t him that’d told me to whip up my horse. ‘It was an accident,’ says I, but I knew I weren’t going to get much sympathy from this lot. They see us cabbies as some species of low life like you might find under a rock if you was ever to turn it over, which in their case they wouldn’t do without a gardener.

“‘He should get to a physician,’ says the old geezer. The number of people who suddenly promote themselves to captains never ceases to amaze me. So the lad tries to sit up, scared I suppose. I don’t blame him. I wouldn’t want to see a sawbones either. You come out worse than when you went in, if you ask me. But sitting up made him yelp out with pain, like a little dog, and that set his mother off again. The lad whispered something and Mr. Bossy leaned down with his ear next to the boy. ‘Say that again.’ Well, I knew what the boy was trying to say without he needed an interpreter. I could tell by looking at them that they didn’t have a penny to rub together. Clean, mind you. She’d dressed them both as decent as she could, that was obvious.

“So Mr. Bossy addressed the first good Samaritan, like they was of like mind. ‘He says they can’t afford to go to a physician and he’s quite all right, thank you.’ But he didn’t look all right to me. He had a goose egg over his eye the size of the knob on the woman’s cane and who knows as he hadn’t broken some bones that we couldn’t see. ‘Nonsense,’ says Mrs. Good Samaritan.

I could tell by the Moses act earlier that she was a woman who got her own way. Probably has a dozen servants and fart-catchers.” O’Leary saw the expression on his wife’s

face. "Sorry, my dear, but you know how I feel about women like that. Anyways, she reaches into her reticule and pulls out a five-dollar note. Yes, five dollars. 'Here,' she says to the widow who'd stopped wailing a bit by now. 'Here. Take this and pay for the doctor.' 'Oh no, ma'am, I couldn't possibly. He'll be right as rain in a minute.' At which point the lad started to heave like he was going to do a big toss-up. And did that turn Mr. Clerk's face green, I can tell you. But the lad kept it down and Mr. Bossy says to the widow, very stern like he was a magistrate, 'My good woman. I understand you are a decent woman and you have pride. But you must put that aside for the sake of your son. Look,' he says. 'Where'd you live? We'll get the lad to your house.' 'Oh,' says she, snivelling again. 'I don't live in Toronto. I've just arrived from Chatham and I haven't got a place yet.' 'Just as I suspected,' says Mr. Bossy. Then he snatches off his own fedora. 'Tell you what, why don't we do a go-around right now. Get you enough money for a night's lodgings at least and the fee for a physician. What do you think, ma'am?' he asked Mrs. Silver Cane.

"Well, she was a bit uppity because she had been the first one to come up with the five dollars and she wanted all the glory. But before you know it all the ladies were dipping into their purses and dropping money into the hat. I tried to get a good look at how much was in there when it came to me. Yes, I had to put in something, they'd have had my hide otherwise. I reckon there was close to a hundred dollars. I made sure Mr. Bossy gave it all to her and some didn't fall into his own pocket on the way. Somebody piped up and said that I could take them to the closest doctor, which I thought was a right cheek. They didn't offer to pay my docket, I noticed. But by now, Timmy seemed somewhat improved. So Mr. Bossy helped the lad to stand up and he showed he could walk all right. 'You're lucky,' says this man to me, wagging his finger. As if it were my fault. The boy were the lucky one, if you ask me. He could have been

killed. As he hobbled by, he looked up at me with his big brown eyes. 'Sorry for all the trouble, sir,' he says. 'But can I have my hoop?' Fortunately, somebody had already got it and straightened it out.

"Ah, you're forever saying I'm down on the human race, Lal, well all this kindness would have warmed your heart. Mr. Bossy says as how he'll escort the lad and his ma. 'What about your train?' I asks. 'You'll have missed it by now.' He gives me a look. 'There are more important things in life than catching a train,' says he, and I know he also means than getting a fare. So off they went. I hung around a bit, in spite of the nasty looks I was getting from the clerk. I hoped I'd pick up some business, but most of that lot have their own carriages and I got not a nibble. Besides, they all wanted to sit around and talk about what just happened, which was probably the most excitement they'd had since the undermaid fell down in a fit in the scullery." O'Leary took a deep pull on his pipe and eyed his wife, who was sitting quietly in the inglenook with her mending.

"So what do you think of all that, my dear?"

Mrs. O'Leary bit off the end of the thread. "I'd say it was a queer from beginning to end."

O'Leary laughed and puffed out smoke at the same time, which made him cough. "I thought as how you wouldn't be fooled," he said, his eyes watering.

"Are you going to report them?"

"Nah. It's not my tit that they milked, was it?"

Chapter Eight

IT WAS ALMOST TEN O'CLOCK by the time Murdoch returned to his lodgings. He was dead tired, famished, and in decidedly low spirits. The house was in darkness, but when he let himself in, he saw there was a light in the kitchen. A smell of sausages lingered in the air and he hoped there were some left. Since Mrs. Kitchen had packed her and her husband off to Muskoka to see if they could cure Arthur's consumption, one of the new lodgers, Katie Tibbett, had taken over the cooking. And truth be told, however fond he was of Mrs. Kitchen, the one thing Murdoch didn't miss was her cooking. Katie was a good cook and now he looked forward to coming home to tasty meals. Murdoch, his old friend Charlie Seymour, and Amy Slade, a schoolteacher, were the others who now boarded in the house and they paid Katie a small wage in exchange for housekeeping duties. She was the young mother of twin baby boys and would be destitute if it weren't for this arrangement.

Good food wasn't the only reason Murdoch liked being at home these days. Charlie, a sergeant at number four station, was a bachelor whose taciturn speech belied an intense and passionate nature. They had great animated discussions about life, death, and God, not to mention bicycles. Murdoch knew it was Charlie's night to be on duty at the station, but he wished he was available to talk to.

And then there was Miss Amy Slade. They had met in January, when she had asked for his help with a police matter that involved one of her pupils. Murdoch found himself in a constant turmoil of feeling, which had started almost as soon as he met her. If he were to be honest with

himself, which he didn't particularly want to be, he had to admit that it was partly because of Amy Slade that he hadn't proposed marriage to Mrs. Enid Jones.

The kitchen door opened and the woman in question emerged. She was in a quilted red house gown and her hair, usually so neatly confined, was loose about her shoulders. Murdoch almost missed the peg on the coat tree as he went to hang up his coat.

"Good evening, Will. You are very late tonight. You must have been working on a case."

She wasn't at all uncomfortable about the casualness of her dress, which paradoxically made him more so.

"I was indeed."

"Come into the kitchen. Katie has left some delicious toad-in-the-hole in the warming oven. Your case must be a difficult one, by the look of you."

He followed her, marvelling yet again how she was able to pick up his mood so easily. He also marvelled at the beauty of her fair hair, which was thick and curly and reached almost to her waist. All this marvelling made him irritated with himself. He was as fickle as water, pining for one woman after another.

As if on cue, Amy turned to him and gave him a rather enigmatic smile. "I picked up a letter from the post for you today. I believe it's from Mrs. Kitchen."

"Oh, good." Murdoch rubbed his hands together with excessive zeal. He didn't want Amy to think he was waiting on a letter from Enid.

The envelope was on the table, propped up against the salt cellar.

"Why don't you sit down, and I'll get your supper."

This was not usual for Amy. She'd made it clear from the beginning that in her view, men and women were equally capable of making a meal, getting it out of the oven, and cleaning up after themselves. This was all new to Murdoch

and he was still getting used to it. Frankly, he'd rather liked the way Mrs. Kitchen and then Enid had looked after him.

He headed for the stove. "That's all right, I can do it ... Ow." He'd underestimated the heat of the warming oven and the plate was hot.

"Use the teapot holder," said Amy. She didn't jump up to help him. He did as she said, gripped the plate, and came back to the table. The toad-in-the-hole looked delicious, the plump sausages sticking out through the pastry, the gravy thick.

Amy sat across from him and leaned her elbows on the table. With her hair unpinned in that way, she looked like a young girl. The house gown was fastened to the neck, but the sleeves were loose and she was revealing her bare forearms, well shaped, pale-skinned with a smattering of freckles.

He speared one of the sausages. "How were the twins today?"

"They were a bit mardy. Katie says they are teething. You'd better be prepared, they might wake you up tonight."

"I'd better put cotton wool in my ears then."

"You already look exhausted, Will. What has happened?"

"Let me feed the beast within first, then I'll tell you." He picked up the letter, immediately getting gravy on it. "Damn."

"Shall I read it to you while you eat?"

"That'd be swell."

Too late he realized Mrs. Kitchen might have made a reference to Mrs. Enid Jones, her former lodger. Or worse, some shrewd comment about the new boarder, Miss Slade. But Amy was already slit open the envelope and it would seem churlish, if not suspicious, to snatch the letter away from her. He gave a little mental prayer and concentrated on stuffing pastry into his mouth.

Amy began to read. "'My dear Will. Life here continues to be quiet. Now that I have a routine, my work is not arduous.

I am not used to giving orders to other people, but that is what I am supposed to do so I do it. The girls are for the most part industrious and honest, thank the Lord. I am happy to report that Arthur continues to gain strength. He frets at the idleness as he puts it, but it is obvious the air and rest are doing him good. I would never have known what fresh air really is if we hadn't come here. Toronto is dirty indeed. The patients are weighed every week and he has actually put on two pounds. We celebrated by a little party with the others on his floor. We were all wrapped up against the cold because, as much as possible, everybody stays on the veranda for the air. Arthur complained that if the consumption doesn't get him, the cold will, but there are hints that spring is coming and that will be more comfortable. He says to tell you he misses the smell of your tobacco and especially the evening talks you used to have. There is a young boy two beds down who is only seventeen, and he is the most ill of all of them. The nurses shake their heads at us behind his back, meaning he is a hopeless case. Arthur has taken him under his wing and is telling him the stories of your cases and how you solved them. The boy's name is John and he begged me to tell you that when he is better, he would like to come down to Toronto and meet you. He'd like to be a police officer. I say my prayers that this might be. How is everything in the house?" Amy paused and Murdoch braced himself. Here it comes. Amy continued. "'How is Mr. Seymour? And that poor young girl with the babies? Is Miss Slade behaving herself?'" Amy stopped reading. "Why would she say that? What sort of impression did I give her?"

Mrs. Kitchen had met Amy once just before they were leaving for Muskoka. The schoolteacher had been wearing her pantaloons and jerkin and even though her manners were impeccable and she was very well spoken, Beatrice had been shocked.

"It was your, er, your Rational Dress. Mrs. K is quite conservative."

Amy sighed. She had experienced such reactions many times. "She signs off by saying, 'I say my rosary constantly. Remember us in your prayers, Will. Yours sincerely, Beatrice Kitchen.'"

They were both quiet for a few moments, Murdoch thinking about Arthur and the precariousness of his life. Then he picked up his plate and stood up. "I'll make a pot of tea."

He lifted one of the lids from the stovetop and dropped in a piece of coal to build up the fire. While they waited for the water to boil, he started to tell her something of what had happened that day. He had too much respect for her to treat her as if she were a potential hysteric, so he told her about the murder, glossing over the more horrendous injuries but sparing nothing else.

She straightened in her chair. "What a dreadful thing. I do pity his wife. Do you have a notion as to the culprit?"

"It looks very much like a thief. Howard wore a silver pocket watch, but it is gone. His boots were also taken. I don't know if anything else is missing yet."

"Who found him?"

"One of the parishioners. A woman by the name of Sarah Dignam. She was coming for a prayer meeting."

"Poor woman."

"Indeed. She is dreadfully upset."

He hesitated, wondering whether he should share his thoughts about Miss Dignam, but they seemed rather unfair and he had tangled with Amy before about denoting strong emotions in women as hysteria.

"It's funny, after I left her I was reminded of this chopper I knew at the camp. His nickname was 'Monk' not because of any pious habits, far from it, but because we all thought he resembled a monkey. He had abnormally long arms and short bandy legs and masses of hair all over him."

Amy smiled. "Surely it wasn't a physical resemblance to Miss Dignam that made you think of him?"

"Hardly. Brodie was something of an outcast, but he found this stray dog about the camp and he became a changed man. He loved that mongrel and became friends with any other chopper that paid attention to the little creature. There was a lot of snickering behind his back, as you can imagine with that bunch of hard hearts, but they wouldn't have dared say anything to his face because Monk was far too tough." Murdoch started to fold the tea towel. "Anyway, what came back to mind so vividly was the night he discovered his dog, Paddy was its name, was missing. He was beside himself. We weren't supposed to leave the camp after dark because it was too dangerous, but I couldn't stand to see him so I agreed to go with him in search of Paddy." Murdoch hesitated, not sure how much he should tell Amy, but she was obviously listening intently and he could feel how much he wanted to unburden himself. He'd never told anybody the story before. "We didn't have to go far because we soon picked up a trail of blood leading off one of the runs. Paddy had managed to drag himself to the shelter of the trees. He must have been attacked by a coyote because his ear was half off and he had several deep bites on his head and legs. The worst was the one at his throat."

"Oh how dreadful."

"It was. At first I thought he was dead, but Monk dropped to his knees beside him and Paddy moved his head and tried to lick his face. Brodie just recoiled in horror and he yelled at me. 'I can't bear it. We must do something.' I tried to tell him that the dog would die soon enough, but Paddy whimpered and tried to crawl toward him. Brodie screamed and before I could stop him, he reached for a nearby stone ... with two blows, he dispatched the creature on the spot."

Amy was gazing at him, her hand to her cheek in horror.

"After that he cried, clutching the dog to his chest, rocking back and forth ... I didn't know what to do or say. Finally he stopped and I persuaded him to bury the little mongrel, which we did."

"Oh Will, that is such a sad story."

"There was an expression in Miss Dignam's eyes and the way she cried for those few moments that reminded me of Monk when we first found the dog and he knew he'd lost him. It was as if a door had opened up into the sorrow of all their lives." He averted his eyes. "My God, that sounds fanciful."

Amy reached out and touched his hand. "No, it doesn't at all. I had a pupil once whose mother died suddenly, influenza I think it was, the girl was about twelve years old. When she came back to school, we happened to be studying *Romeo and Juliet*. The girl wasn't a particularly good student or had never before shown much response to Shakespeare, but this afternoon when we got to the passage where Juliet dies, she burst out crying. I couldn't soothe her. She was only a child, but she had known much loss in her young life."

Murdoch smiled at her gratefully. "Monk left the camp at the end of the season and I never saw him again. We never talked about poor Paddy ... I was also troubled by the way he killed the dog."

"I suppose it could be considered as an act of mercy. The dog must have been suffering."

"He was, but Brodie went into a kind of panic as if the sight was more than he could bear. Whether that was for the dog's sake is debatable. I hope I'm never faced with a situation like that." Murdoch shuddered. "I still have nightmares about it."

At that moment, the kettle began to whistle.

"Good timing. A cup of tea will hit the spot," said Murdoch and he got up and went over to the stove. While the tea was

poured and sipped, he resumed his narrative of the day's events.

"I spent the evening going through Howard's personal portfolio. He was very organized and everything was filed under subject matter, including sermons, church business. There was quite a bit of correspondence and minutes of meetings about the installation of a new water closet. Apparently, the proposal was controversial. There were those who thought it was a ridiculous expense and the earth closet was quite adequate and those who thought it would enhance the public standing of the parish to have such a fine piece, not to mention being more suitable for the older members of the church."

Amy smiled. "Surely the poor man would not have been killed over the matter of a water closet?"

"Let's hope not. I saw the new facility and it is indeed very handsome and probably cost a lot of money. As far as I can tell Reverend Howard was generally keen to improve the church furnishings. But except for minor quibbles from a few of the elders, I couldn't find any evidence that somebody was sufficiently enraged to murder him over it." Murdoch poured them each more tea. "The letter opener told me nothing new other than that the thrust was a single one, made hard and deep. There was no sign of footprints inside or out. So that's it for the silent witnesses. As for human witnesses, that was equally as unproductive. Crabtree and Fyfer questioned as many people in the area as they could, but so far nothing at all has emerged. It was such a dismal day, there was hardly anybody out to see anything. The murderer came and went without a trace. He might as well have been a spirit."

Amy blew on her tea to cool it. "You've been saying *he* all the time when referring to the culprit. Do the injuries preclude a female attacker?"

He reflected for a moment. "The letter opener had been thrust into his neck very deeply and then I'd say he was

kicked hard when he was on the ground, but he would have been defenceless by then. So, no, alas, we cannot at this point eliminate the possibility it was a woman who killed him. The coroner, who is a woman by the way, said she will do a post-mortem examination in the morning. I'll attend that. Sometimes there are surprises."

"Such as?"

"Oh, I don't know, maybe the pastor was an opium eater or a drinker or had syphilis."

Amy looked at him in amazement. "Is that likely?"

"Believe me, anything is likely."

She gave him a slightly teasing smile. "Are you becoming cynical, Will?"

"Perhaps. I'd like to believe Mr. Howard was as good a man as everybody says he was, but if that's true how can we explain such a tragedy?"

"Ah, we're back to the inscrutable nature of God's intention, are we?"

"That sounds awfully much as if I'm becoming boringly predictable."

"Not at all. Not predictable, just forever questioning." Her eyes held his for a moment. "You've been in the presence of too much human misery, Will. You can't take the sorrows of the world on your shoulders."

Murdoch grabbed at his own neck. "Heck, I thought all that stiffness was from too much riding on my wheel."

Amy pushed back her chair and stood up. "I should go to bed. I am tiredder than I realized."

And that was that. Without more ado, she picked up her candleholder.

"I wish you good night."

To delay her, he said, "How were your pupils today?"

"Let me say, I felt as if I were trying to hold down twenty balloons all at the same time. It's a wonder we didn't float away."

She left and Murdoch groaned to himself. Why had he made light of her remark when she was trying to be kind? What a boor she must think him. He reached for his pipe and tobacco pouch, although he didn't usually smoke in the kitchen. He tamped down the tobacco in the bowl of his Powhatan and struck a match.

He supposed it was true what she'd said about him. He still went to mass but less and less frequently, and he was often restless when the priest delivered his homily, which was usually about some doctrinal issue that Murdoch couldn't completely accept. Amy made no secret of her atheism, although she was obliged to attend church if she wanted to keep her job. She had opted to go to the Presbyterian church on King Street. "If I have to spend two hours of my precious Sunday going to an institution I don't believe in, I might as well get a good sermon out of it and the Presbyterians are the best as far as I'm concerned."

Murdoch had considered inviting her to come to mass with him, just so she could see what it was like, but he knew all too well what she'd think of Father Fair and all the crossing and genuflecting that went on.

He sat for a long time thinking about things - or, more specifically, love and the human heart.

Chapter Nine

INSPECTOR BRACKENREID was in the irascible frame of mind that was so typical of him these days, it would have been something to remark on if he had been otherwise. Murdoch was standing in front of his desk waiting for permission to sit down. Sometimes, the inspector was petty enough to make his officers stand for an unnecessarily long period.

"I'll give you Dewhurst and Birney. You've got Crabtree and Fyfer already. As long as nobody's shirking their duty, that'll be enough, don't you think, Murdoch?"

"Nobody will shirk, sir. They're good officers. But I'd be glad of any constables we can spare from other duties. As you no doubt noticed in this morning's papers, the city is quite caught up with the crime. I'm sure the chief constable would like us to make the case our top priority."

Brackenreid looked as if he wanted to argue the point, but he didn't have the energy. He rubbed his temples.

"Ach. I feel as if there's some malevolent little devil in my head, playing a tune on an anvil."

Murdoch knew exactly what that devil was. He could smell it from where he stood.

"Perhaps a strong cup of tea will help, sir."

"You're right, Murdoch. I'll have one sent up." He flapped his hand. "Sit down, for goodness' sake. I can't keep looking up at you, it makes things worse."

Murdoch took the chair in front of the inspector's desk. He almost felt sorry for the man, he looked so bilious. The whites of his eyes had a yellowish tinge.

"I want every single person interviewed who lives in the vicinity of the church. Somebody must have seen somebody."

I don't care if it was the mayor himself taking a stroll with his paramour, I want to know about it."

"Does Mr. Kennedy have a paramour, sir? I hadn't heard."

Brackenreid groaned in irritation. "No, of course not. It was a figure of speech. You know perfectly well what I mean."

"You mean that as the Reverend Howard was a man of prominence in the community, we must leave no stone unturned to find his murderer, even if that proves to be another person of prominence."

"What? No, for heaven's sake, Murdoch I didn't mean that. We all know he was killed by some passing tramp. Find him and soon. I want a daily report from you. Don't forget, Murdoch, I promoted you and I can unpromote you just as fast."

"Yes, sir. It's not something I would forget."

Brackenreid's flash of anger seemed to have aggravated his headache and he sat for a moment with his head in his hands.

"Is that all, sir? Shall I have Gardiner send up that tea?"

"Yes, good idea. What is your plan now?"

"I'm going back to see Mrs. Howard. I hope she is able to talk to me."

"Mrs. Brackenreid and I met her just after the pastor's appointment to Chalmers. Some charity concert, I think it was." He struggled to remember. "Or was it at Mrs. Maclean's soiree? Oh blast, I don't know. It doesn't matter, does it?"

"Probably not, sir. Unless you think that somebody at the concert is a likely suspect."

"What? Dammit, Murdoch, you go too far."

"I beg your pardon, sir."

"As I was saying. I met the Howards not so long ago. She is a handsome woman and I preferred her to him. Decent-enough fellow, don't get me wrong, but a bit airy-fairy for

my taste. I like to see a fellow with some fire to him. Nothing like a tip-top sermon to set a man up for the day."

Sermonizing hadn't had much impact on Brackenreid's need for the little devil drink, thought Murdoch. He shifted slightly in his seat. Whenever the conversation approached even obliquely to the topic of religion, he knew that he could expect some kind of riposte. Ah here it came.

"I don't know how you manage in your religion, Murdoch. With all that Latin, you can't get any direction at all, surely?"

"The prayer book does have an English translation on one side of the page, sir. And the sermon, or homily as we call it, is in English."

Brackenreid started to shake his head in ostentatious disbelief but thought better of it.

"All right. Get on with it then. I suppose I don't need to remind you to handle the poor woman with kid gloves, do I?"

"No, sir, you don't."

"Quite. That's something I've noticed about you Catholics, you are good at dealing with women."

This remark was so stunningly peculiar that Murdoch had no reply. He stood up.

"Don't forget the tea," said Brackenreid as Murdoch left.

The maid's face was puffy and blotchy from crying. "Mrs. Howard is in the drawing room with Mr. Swanzey, sir."

"I do need to talk to her, Doris."

"Yes, sir." With the merest tap on the door, she showed him in.

Louisa Howard was sitting on the couch by the window, Swanzey beside her. He stood up to greet Murdoch, but Louisa didn't even turn to acknowledge him. She was staring out of the window and he presumed her expression was grief-stricken, but he could see nothing because of the obscuring widow's veil she was wearing. She was already

dressed in deepest mourning and Murdoch wondered not for the first time if every married woman of affluence had black clothes in her wardrobe on the ready for such an eventuality as widowhood.

Reverend Swanzey hovered uncertainly between them. He had a long neck and his prominent Adam's apple bobbed visibly.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Mrs. Howard," said Murdoch, "but as I'm sure you can understand, I am anxious to find your husband's murderer as soon as possible."

There was no other word he could use other than killer but even at the word *murderer* he saw her flinch. She turned to face him. Her voice lacked energy and her breath rippled her crepe veil as she spoke.

"I do understand, Mr. Murdoch. And since last night, all I have been able to think about is your question whether Charles had any enemies."

Swanzey interjected. "Mrs. Howard and I have been discussing this very matter this morning, detective. At first we both as with one voice said no. Charles was a good man, beloved by all he came in contact with." He paused and glanced anxiously at Louisa. She remained steady for the moment. "However, in the course of his work, he had occasion to do things, to make decisions that for the people involved might have seemed harsh. They were not likely to step back and say, 'This good man is merely doing his duty. I have no right to hate him for it.'" Again he paused and looked at Murdoch expectantly.

"I'm afraid I don't know what you are referring to, sir."

Mrs. Howard explained. "My husband was a Visitor for the House of Industry. It was his job to visit the homes of the people who had applied for charitable relief and decide whether they were deserving."

"It is something I do myself," said Swanzey, "and believe me, Mr. Murdoch, not all the cases that come before us deserve help. But these tend to be the kind of people who

will rail against the Visitor himself rather than look to their own shortcomings that have brought them to their predicament. And there is only so much the city can do. I myself have agonized over whether I can grant a coal allowance or food to a poor woman who has neither heat nor sustenance but whose husband I know has succumbed to bad habits.”

He meant he was a drinker.

“That must be difficult, Reverend. Especially as it is not the woman herself who is to blame.”

Swanzey swayed on his tiptoes. “Ah yes, but we encounter many tricksters. The women come to the House to apply because they think we will be more indulgent of them, but they know perfectly well that the husband at home is a drunkard and should be working. And sometimes, I regret to say, they join him in his habit.”

“Quite so. But to return to Mr. Howard for a moment, are you saying, ma’am, sir, that through this work, it is possible he made an enemy, angry enough to kill him?”

“Yes,” whispered Mrs. Howard.

“Did he ever mention such an encounter to you, ma’am?”

“No. He did not. But he never brought the burdens of his work to me. I wanted it that way. I strove to make our home a haven for him, where all those cares could be put aside.”

Murdoch thought of the comfort he himself found from talking over his cases with first the Kitchens, now with Seymour and Amy Slade. He wondered if there had been some place else where Reverend Howard had unburdened himself.

“Where can I get a list of the homes he inspected?”

“The House of Industry would have that,” said Swanzey. “And I should add that his territory was in this area. We are all assigned places that are easily accessible –”

Mrs. Howard interrupted him. “The work is voluntary, detective. It is in addition to all the other duties that a minister in a large parish has to execute.”

And she didn't approve of her husband doing that unpaid work, thought Murdoch.

"As you say, Mrs. Howard, being a Visitor is voluntary, but I myself consider it my civic duty," interjected Swanzey. "But more to the point, detective, if Reverend Howard had antagonized somebody, that person most likely lives not too far from here. And it is highly likely that they would know that he had office hours on Tuesdays."

Murdoch got to his feet. "Thank you, reverend. And you, ma'am. There's just one more thing. I wonder if I could ask your maid to accompany me to the church. I assume she would be the one who would dust the office and I'd like to know if anything else has been taken."

"Is it absolutely necessary? There is so much to do here at the moment."

"I wouldn't ask if it weren't, ma'am. I shan't keep her for long." He knew Mrs. Howard was bereft, but he was finding her rather irritating. There was something sour and self-pitying in her manner.

"Very well, but I warn you, Doris is a rather empty-headed girl, Mr. Murdoch. She might not notice if somebody had walked off with his chair."

Murdoch took his leave and Mrs. Howard returned to gazing out of the window. Reverend Swanzey perched himself beside her on the couch. He was clearly not comfortable in his role as chief comforter. He should have been a Catholic. According to Inspector Brackenreid, we have a certain facility with women, thought Murdoch.

The poor maid was initially afraid to go with him to the office after Murdoch warned her she would have to see the blood stains. But when he explained the importance of knowing if anything was missing, she braced herself and agreed to accompany him. They entered the office, which still had the curtains drawn although the fire had long died

out and the room was cold. Doris shuddered once when she saw the blood on the carpet and on the desk, but on Murdoch's instruction she walked slowly around the room, taking note of everything. Far from being empty-headed, she seemed to be a servant who took pride in her work and knew exactly what belonged where.

"He had a very fine letter opener that always sat on his desk. I don't see it."

"You are right, Doris. It is in the possession of the police."

She blinked as she comprehended what that meant, but she didn't say anything.

She picked up a silver snuff box that was on the lamp table next to the armchair. "Usually this is on the mantelpiece. He loved his snuff, but the mistress didn't like him to use it so he only did when he was in here. But he was trying to break himself of the habit and so sometimes he'd put the box where it was less convenient to reach." She replaced the box. "I can't see what harm it did."

"Is the chair usually across from the armchair?"

"No, sir. It lines up with the other ones for when he has his meetings."

They took the next half an hour going over the room carefully, but Doris was adamant everything was in place except for the letter opener.

Murdoch thanked her and commended both her courage and her awareness. He was gratified to see the shy blush of pleasure on her face.

"Reverend Howard's boots were removed and as they are nowhere to be found, I assume his attacker took them. Were you responsible for cleaning them, Doris?"

"Yes, sir. I did the boots every night before I went to bed so as they'd be ready."

"Can you describe them for me?"

She looked a little puzzled. "They was just ordinary boots, sir. Black of course. Not new though. He didn't like waste and rather than buy new when another would, he'd mend

and make do. Those boots were mended sole and heel at least two times." Murdoch made a note. It was something distinguishing at least. Suddenly Doris tapped her fingers to her forehead. "I'm sorry, sir, but the shock has fair blown my idea pot in two. I was almost about to forget his laces. In the morning, he broke one of his laces. We didn't have any spare and he said he didn't have time to buy some more so he took one from his other pair of boots." She looked at Murdoch expectantly. "Oh dear, what I mean is that the second pair of boots is brown. So he had one pair of black laces and one brown. Mrs. Howard would have had a conniption if she'd seen, but those sort of things weren't important to him."

"Thank you, Doris. That could be very helpful indeed. I have one more question. Did Mr. Howard post his own letters?"

"No, sir. I did."

"Did he write a letter on Tuesday morning?"

"Not that I know of, sir. He could have written something when he went to his office after his luncheon, but that wasn't usual. Friday was letter-writing day and I would take them to the post office that afternoon." Again there was the sad little smile. "Mr. Howard liked his routine. He didn't change it, ever. He always said that the earth was without form until God created it and it was up to us to follow in God's will by making order throughout our lives." Her voice was wistful and Murdoch felt a pang of pity.

"How long have you worked for Mrs. Howard, Doris?"

"Since I was fourteen, sir. I came up with them from Buffalo."

"Is your family still there?"

"I don't have a family anymore, sir. They all died of the smallpox. Mr. and Mrs. Howard took me in."

She was a young girl, surely not yet twenty, and however grateful she might be, her life as the only servant of a man who hated variety must have been dreadfully dull.

Murdoch walked her back to the manse and took her round the rear of the house to the servant's entrance. Here with sweet, natural good manners, she offered him her hand.

"I'll say good morning then, sir. I hope I have been of help."

"Indeed you have, Doris. Thank you."

She blushed again, but there were tears in her eyes.

"The master was good like you, sir. I will miss him terrible."

Chapter Ten

MURDOCH SAW THE HORSE MANURE just in time, but as he swerved to avoid it his wheel skidded on a patch of ice and he almost lost control of his bicycle. If it hadn't been for that moment of distraction, he would probably have seen the boy sneaking up on the elderly woman who was hobbling down Yonge Street. As it was, he heard a cry, saw that a woman had collapsed to the ground, and a boy was running as fast as he could away from her. A passerby stopped briefly to see if the old lady was all right, then he took off after the boy. He was a husky fellow and his frame couldn't keep pace with his good intentions. Murdoch hesitated. A woman was helping the old lady to her feet. There wasn't much point in his racing after the boy until he knew exactly what had happened. This section of Yonge Street, where stores lined each side of the street, was always crowded at this time of day and several people were already surrounding the woman.

He pulled over to the curb, dismounted, and eased through the group of spectators.

"Excuse me, I'm a policeman, excuse me."

Close up, the woman who was the centre of attention wasn't quite as old as she had first appeared. Her face was thin and toothless, but what he could see of her face was relatively unlined. She was holding a silk handkerchief to her eyes and repeating in a quivery voice, "Dearie me, dearie me. He took all my money."

"Ma'am. I'm a policeman. Can you tell me what happened?"

"She was robbed, that's what happened," said a young woman next to her. "That street arab just came up and snatched her purse."

Murdoch saw that the man had given up his chase and was coming back. He came into the circle of helpers.

"He got away from me. I'm so sorry." He was still panting, his weatherbeaten face flushed from his exertions.

"Did you lose much, ma'am?" Murdoch asked.

She shook her head, the handkerchief still at the ready. "Just my streetcar tickets. I was on my way to see my daughter. Oh dear. That's all I had with me."

"Don't you fret yourself, ma'am," said the lad. "I'm sure there's folks here that'll help you out."

"I have an extra ticket," said the young woman. She reached into her glove. "Please accept this. I'm so sorry about your money."

"Here," said the young fellow. "I've only got fifty cents, but I'd be obliged if you would take it." There was a sympathetic shift among the bystanders and the beginning of a shuffle with purses and pockets.

The old woman shook her head vigorously. "Thank you, sir. I couldn't possibly. This gentleman here says he is a policeman and I'm sure he'll be able to retrieve my purse for me."

The young man glanced over at Murdoch. "Good thing you was on the spot. Did you get a gander at the lad? All I saw was his backside, begging your pardon, ladies."

"No, I too saw him only from the rear. Can you describe him, ma'am?"

"Alas no. He came up behind me, snatched my purse, knocked me to the ground, and ran off. I cannot say I noticed anything at all. He could have been a red Indian for all I saw."

The woman next to her burst in.

"I saw. He was wearing a checkered cap, brown knickerbockers, and a plaid jacket."

Murdoch took out his notebook. He'd seen that much himself, but he wrote down what she said out of courtesy. She leaned over his shoulder to see what he was writing.

"I'd say he was about ten years old, dark skin."

Murdoch smiled at her. She was a pretty woman, with lively brown eyes. She was neatly dressed in a plum-coloured walking suit with a matching wide hat on which bobbed two long plumes. On her chest was pinned the white bow of a temperance advocate.

"You're a good witness," he said.

"He seemed older than that to me," interjected the country man. "More like fifteen or sixteen. But the lady's right about the skin, I'd say he was a quadroon."

"Can anybody else add to this description?" Murdoch asked the onlookers, but all he got was a gabble of confusing statements: "Too far away, definitely dark. Yes, dark-skinned like a Negro, older, younger."

He turned back to the victim. "I'll have to make a report, ma'am. Can I have your name and address?"

"Really, officer, I am quite all right. My daughter will be worried, so I must get along. Thanks to this young lady, I can continue my journey. If the poor lad was driven to rob me, he must be one of our unfortunates. I don't want to press charges. There was only a small amount of change in my purse."

"I'm afraid that I will still have to write up a report, ma'am. We will try to apprehend the boy." He could see her alarm was growing at the thought of continuing police involvement. This was by no means an uncommon reaction among the public.

"Don't worry, ma'am, you'll have nothing further to do with us unless necessary."

"Very well. My name is Mrs. Agnes Pierce and I live at 720 Queen Street East. I am a widow."

Murdoch wrote it down. The onlookers were starting to drift away. "Will you describe your purse to me?"

"It was black silk with a gold-coloured clasp and a strap. It contained two blue tickets for the streetcar and perhaps twenty cents in coins."

"Where does your daughter live?" asked the young temperance woman.

"Oh, she resides on Church Street near St. Michael's Cathedral."

"I'll take you there."

The elderly woman shook her head even more vehemently.

"No. Please. I do appreciate your kindness, but I am quite all right. I'll get along now. My cane please."

Another bystander, a man, had collected her cane for her and he handed it over. With a murmured "Thank you, kindly," she took it and began to shuffle off. The temperance woman looked as if she would follow her, but the boy's pursuer said, "We'd better let her be. She's got pride, that lady, bless her heart."

"I'll take down your names," said Murdoch. "If we catch the thief, I might have to call you as witnesses."

The man gave his name as Joshua Winters. He was from a small town north of Toronto and just visiting the city. The young woman was Helena Martin. She gave her address, describing exactly where it was. For a moment, Murdoch imagined she was going to invite him for tea, but then he was embarrassed at his own conceit. They had only had a few minutes of contact, for goodness' sake.

That done, he tipped his hat and remounted his bicycle. He had the feeling that Miss Martin continued to watch him as he cycled down Yonge Street until he turned right onto Elm Street where the House of Industry was located.

Chapter Eleven

THE HOUSE OF INDUSTRY was a flat-faced, two storey building and everything about it seemed pinched, from the dun-coloured brick to the low roof and narrow windows. A high fence enclosing the entire building kept the curious from observing the supplicant paupers as they lined up daily to get their bowl of free soup. Murdoch opened the gate and walked up to the door, which was tall and wide with a stained-glass fanlight and arched lintel. The elegance was unexpected, like a friendly smile on the bailiff's face. He pulled on the bell and the door was opened promptly by a white-haired old man in a dark formal suit.

"You'll be wanting to see Superintendent Laughlen, I presume," he said in a hoarse voice, as if he had spent his life shouting. Murdoch wasn't sure why the porter made that presumption, perhaps nobody else in the House received visitors. He handed over his card, which the man glanced at briefly.

"Ah yes," he croaked. "Come this way."

He ushered him into a hall that was so ill-lit, Murdoch could not tell what colour the walls were painted. Something dark and sober, but there were no decorative pictures or furniture as far as he could see. He wasn't surprised. This was a charity house funded by the city taxpayers, no luxury would be allowed. The old man, he almost called him a gaoler, shuffled across to a door to the left, tapped and pressed his ear against the door. In response to a command that Murdoch could not hear, he then beckoned and opened the door.

"Detective Murdoch to see you, sir." He backed out. What had he been? A circus barker? A music-hall master of ceremonies? Murdoch thought perhaps he should burst through the *portières* with a triumphant hurrah.

"Go in," the old man whispered and he shuffled off.

When he entered the room, Murdoch could understand why he hadn't heard Superintendent Laughlen answer the knock. He was seated behind a massive desk at the far end of the room that was spacious but as dreary as a Trappist refectory. There was no other furniture except for two plain wooden chairs in front of the desk. This was a business office, with one small fireplace, plain Holland blinds on the windows, and walls lined with filing cabinets and shelves of what looked like bound annual reports.

There was one lamp on the desk, the wick turned low, throwing Superintendent Laughlen's face into shadow except where the light reflected from his bald head. As if to balance the dearth of hair in that location, he had a full beard that jutted out from his cheekbones to the top of his waistcoat.

He got to his feet immediately and came around the desk with his hand outstretched. He was a big man without his flesh conveying in any way that he was convivial.

"Good day, Mr. Murdoch. I was expecting somebody from the police to come. It's concerning the tragic death of Reverend Howard, I presume."

"Yes, sir, it is. And may I express my condolences." "Thank you. We are all quite devastated."

Laughlen pulled over one of the straight chairs for Murdoch and eased himself into a second one so he was facing him without the barrier of desk or privilege. Murdoch liked him. His brown eyes were sincerely doleful.

"How is poor Mrs. Howard?"

"As well as can be expected."

"Have you made progress with the case?"

"We have not yet caught the person responsible, superintendent, but we are making progress." Murdoch took out his notebook. "One of the reasons I am here is because Mrs. Howard told me her husband did visiting duties for the House of Industry and I wondered if I could have a copy of his list."

"Of course." Laughlen got up at once and headed for the filing cabinet. "But I heard that Charles had surprised a thief. Is that not the case?" He opened one of the drawers, flicked through the folders, and removed one. For a big man, he moved lightly and quickly. He returned to Murdoch.

"We're by no means ruling out a thief, sir, but I don't think he was taken by surprise. The evidence suggests that Reverend Howard allowed his attacker to enter his study."

Laughlen looked shocked. "Do you think it was somebody he knew?"

"That or somebody he might expect to be there. Tuesday was his regular office day."

"I see." Laughlen took a sheet of paper from the folder. "Here is the most recent list. He made his monthly visit just last week. He had a heavily populated district and he had twelve applicants. You can see he gave tickets to all but four of them."

The superintendent sighed. "Reverend Howard had only been with us since January, but he showed signs of being an excellent Visitor. His inexperience made him a little too generous perhaps, but he was not without perspicacity. He could detect frauds as well as any of our more experienced men." He handed the piece of paper to Murdoch. "You can keep that sheet, detective, I have a copy." Like a lot of bald men, Laughlen had a habit of stroking his head as if unable to accept the loss it revealed. He did so now. "Am I correct in assuming that you suspect the, er" – Laughlen stumbled over the word *murderer* – "the, er, culprit, might be one of our applicants? Somebody the pastor rejected perhaps?"

Howard was not the only one who showed perspicacity.

"I am exploring that as a possibility. Did Reverend Howard ever mention any trouble to you?"

"Not at all. As you see, this month, he refused help to only four families. One of those is well known to us and they were turned down without ceremony. The husband is a lazy good-for-nothing and he always sends his wife to beg for him."

Even lazy-good-for-nothings have to eat, Murdoch thought, but this wasn't the time to discuss the limits of charity so he made no comment. There were three other names on the list with a stamp beside them, *Refused*.

"Do you know anything about these ones, sir?"

Laughlen glanced at the list. "No, they are not known to me. Last year we had well over two thousand families who applied to us for relief so alas, I can hardly know each one personally." He sounded genuinely regretful rather than defensive. "I can look at the slips and see what Reverend Howard wrote on them if you wish."

"Thank you, sir, that would be helpful."

The superintendent returned to his desk. "They are all here, as a matter of fact, I haven't yet pasted them into the report book." He riffled through a pile of papers, pulled out four, and brought them over to Murdoch. "He rejected a Mrs. Tugwell, a widow; the Gleeson family; a woman, Mary Hanrahan, not married; and Thomas Coates."

Murdoch looked at the slips. They recorded the name, address, and age of each applicant, the number of people in the family, and a comment in Howard's neat handwriting. All four of these applicants had been refused as "undeserving." Mrs. Tugwell was cited as living with her daughter, who was *a known woman of intemperate and immoral habits*. Gleeson was *malingering and capable of working*, Miss Hanrahan was a *drunkard*, as was Thomas Coates.

"What is the procedure for somebody in need of relief, superintendent?"

Laughlen sat down and leaned back in the chair, as much as he could without imperiling his own safety. "Every weekday afternoon from two o'clock until five, one of our trustees receives applications from those who consider themselves to be destitute."

He must have seen something pass across Murdoch's face because he added quickly. "Please don't misunderstand me, my good sir. I would say that the majority of the cases that come before us are genuinely in need of assistance. Often the husband is ill or injured and unable to work. More often than I care to say, it is a woman, close to her confinement who has been abandoned by her spouse, leaving her with children to feed. Those are our most heart-rending cases and I would say the most deserving."

Murdoch remembered what Amy had said to him. He couldn't rule out the possibility that the murderer was a woman. Laughlen continued.

"But we also have to sort out those who would not work for a living if the Lord Jesus himself asked them to. All applicants are assigned to one of our Visitors, who then goes to their residence to see if that person is deserving of the relief. If he considers them to be so, he will give them tickets so they can receive bread and coal, and they can also come to the House for a daily bowl of soup."

"If a family is refused help, what would they do?"

"Oh, believe me, Mr. Murdoch, they find somewhere. Hunger is a strong motivator. And as I say, these are people who prefer to drink and live off the charity of others rather than work." He tucked his hands under his beard like a man accustomed to giving interviews. "It is my duty as superintendent to be frugal with public money. We can accommodate about a hundred permanent residents in the House itself, mostly elderly, decent folk who have ended up friendless and alone and no longer capable of fending for themselves. However, our primary work is with outdoor relief. Last year, we gave out relief to more than eleven

thousand persons, men, women and children, at a total expense of thirteen thousand five hundred dollars. That works out to one dollar eighteen cents per head."

"Economical for sure."

Laughlen missed the irony in Murdoch's voice or chose to ignore it. He was warming to his subject, a man who took pride in his work.

"Our volunteers are mostly men of the cloth, but we do have two or three laymen; one is an eminent lawyer, one a grocer who is a respected elder of his church. We could not afford to do our work without their contribution." Another head patting. "Our biggest headache continues to be the casuals. You're probably more used to calling them vagrants. Men for the most part, although I have seen an unfortunate woman or two." He shook his head sadly at those particular daughters of Eve. "These men have no home, some of them have come into hard times through no fault of their own and those men I am only too glad to help, but too many in my opinion have chosen a life outside that of normal men where they have no responsibility and subsist through the good nature of others. You must know the kind of man I am referring to, Mr. Murdoch. You've had to arrest a few of them, I'll warrant."

Murdoch nodded. The question of vagrancy was a bone of contention at the different police stations. The law said any man thought to be a vagrant had to be charged and brought before the magistrate. In the winter, the cells were frequently clogged with men on their two-week sentence, glad to be out of the cold in spite of the discomfort of the jail. They invariably brought bedbugs and lice with them to the cells. Most officers wanted the House of Industry or the religious House of Providence to house the men instead. Murdoch agreed with that. In his experience, the majority of these vagrants were too beaten down by poverty and drink and their attendant ills of malnourishment and disease to be true criminals. But they were a nuisance, begging for money

from respectable citizens when they dared or were desperate enough.

Laughlen patted his head again in a search for hair. "Of course, since we instituted the labour test, we have been able to weed out the corrigible from the incorrigible. We show compassion to the elderly and the infirm but not to the lazy. Any man that refuses to work is, by the same token, refused another night's lodging. If we are looking for criminals, there would be a place to start. Many of them take actual pleasure in defying society's rules."

"Would Reverend Howard have had anything to do with the casuals?"

Laughlen pursed his lips. "He had no need to. Other volunteers manage the casual poor and the Visitors are not required to come to the House. Once a month, I gather up the applications and send them over to them." "So he would not necessarily have known any of the casuals or they him?"

"That is correct. They come here by five o'clock in the evening for a bed for the night. During the day, after the work is complete, they are not allowed to stay here. You never know where they are wandering. They go to another institution, most likely. There is the House of Providence that the Sisters of St. Joseph run. Apparently they insist that the receivers of their charity stay for prayers. We are non-denominational so the men usually come here first. You'd be surprised how ungodly many of these people really are, Mr. Murdoch. Some of them avoid prayer as much as they avoid water. But it is not inconceivable that one of them would know of the pastor's habits and go there to dun him. It would fit your picture of somebody he'd let into his study."

"Do you have a list of those men, sir?"

"Yes, we have a register. I'll get the porter to make a copy for you. Not that it will help that much. They are not allowed to stay more than three consecutive nights in the casual ward and when they leave here, we have no way to trace

them. Almost three-quarters of our tramps are not from Toronto and none of them have proper addresses. They are like sharks that I believe never rest. Homeless, friendless, they wander the land searching for who knows what. Are they Christ among us, Mr. Murdoch? Come to test us? Sometimes I wonder about it."

A little surprised by such a poetic turn of phrase from this practical man, Murdoch could only nod.

Chapter Twelve

MURDOCH WAS LATE getting to Humphrey's Funeral Home and Dr. Ogden made it clear she was not happy at his tardiness. He muttered his apologies. Cavendish, the police photographer, was standing with his tripod at the ready. He looked uneasy, but then he always did. An older, spry-looking man with a notebook open on his lap was perched on a high stool close to the examining table.

Dr. Ogden waved her hand. "This is my father, Dr. Uzziel Ogden. He has offered to serve as both a second medical witness and our clerk."

The man hopped off his perch and held out his hand to Murdoch. "Good day to you, sir. Nasty business this." His cheery tone belied the words and his blue eyes actually twinkled. He was enjoying himself. His daughter must have inherited her stature from her mother because she was a good seven or eight inches taller than her father, although she did have his keen blue eyes and rather sharp nose.

"I didn't know the poor fellow personally, but Julia did and I thought I could come along and make sure she didn't miss anything in the shock of it all."

Dr. Ogden smiled briefly and Murdoch couldn't tell if she was offended by this remark or not. He had the feeling she wouldn't take kindly to women being considered the weaker sex.

"Well, I'm ready to begin," she said. "Would you like an apron, Mr. Murdoch? Father?"

She was wearing a heavy brown holland pinafore. Murdoch remembered Sister Regina had worn something very similar when she'd conducted her natural science

classes. Not that she'd cut up anything more fleshy than mushrooms.

Dr. Ogden pulled back the canvas cover, revealing the grey, stained body. Murdoch had seen corpses before, but they never failed to jolt him. The utter absence of life where there had so recently been one was always troubling. Howard's clothes had been removed, but the body hadn't been washed and the blood had turned black around the side of his face and where it had spilled down his shoulder and chest from the stab wound. Dr. Ogden took a sponge from a dish on the nearby table and wiped away the congealed blood from his neck. Her father handed her a measuring stick with which she checked the wound.

"Seven-eighths of an inch across," she said and he wrote it down. "It was not a sharp instrument so the skin and flesh around the area are depressed and bruised. There is a torn fragment of his shirt visible in the cut." She pulled it out with a pair of tweezers and placed the fragment on a dish. Uzziel wrote a label. Murdoch noticed the pastor's body was quite hirsute and rather flabby, which was consistent in a man of his age and sedentary profession. His male member was a good size.

Dr. Ogden sponged away the blood from the side of the face. "The orbital bone is fractured, the eyeball crushed, and the cheekbone is depressed. I'm sure we will find it is fractured in more than one place. The cause of these injuries was a blunt instrument and we have a rather clear imprint here on the cheek." She took the stick and measured the marks carefully, calling out the numbers to her father. "It is roughly in the shape of a crescent, the bruising is uniform, so I would agree with you, Mr. Murdoch, that it is likely caused from a vicious kick. I think we can safely assume that the blows to the eye and the eye socket were also from kicks. You can see the eyeball has been pushed down slightly to the left, which would be consistent

with the victim being prone and on his back at this point. Would you agree?"

Murdoch didn't particularly want to examine the bloody mess of an eye, but he peered more closely and agreed with what Dr. Ogden had said.

"Now, I can't say with any certainty whether the boot was worn by a man or a woman. The mark is definitely rounded rather than pointed, which would rule out a woman's fashionable boot, but as far as I can tell the mark could indicate either male or female ordinary footwear. What do you think, Mr. Murdoch? Have a look through the magnifying glass. And, father, perhaps you could offer an opinion as well."

Murdoch took the glass and bent forward to see. "It's hard to say. Could be either."

"I'd say that was a man's boot that did that," Uzziel said. "A woman couldn't have used that much force."

Julia made no comment, but she glanced at Murdoch.

"I think a healthy woman in a state of extreme rage would have been able to inflict such an injury," he said.

"Ah, you are probably right, you're the detective after all," Uzziel said.

Dr. Ogden lifted and rotated both of Howard's arms so she could examine them.

"No sign of bruising on either arm, which suggests that he had no chance to defend himself. The nails on each hand are intact. This dark splotch between the index finger of the right hand appears to be ink. Had he written a letter recently?"

"It would seem so, ma'am, but I haven't found it yet.

I am pursuing the matter."

"Well that's your province, not mine."

Dr. Ogden walked slowly to the end of the table, making a close observation of the body.

"He is clean and well nourished." Suddenly, she leaned forward and pinched at something on the chest hair. "He

has, however, acquired lice." She went back to examine the hair on Howard's head, parting the strands carefully. "I don't see signs of bites, so I assume this louse is a recent guest."

"Are we going to mention the louse?" asked Uzziel.

"It doesn't seem significant. He was a minister. He probably had some parishioners of the poorest kind."

She continued with the external examination. "There is a scar on the right thigh reminiscent of a chicken pox scar, otherwise the body is unmarked." She moved aside the flaccid penis. "Testicles intact and normal size. Penis uncircumcised."

She took some long swabs from a jar on the movable table. "I'll check his orifices. Will you label the appropriate bottle, father?"

She went back to the head of the table and inserted the swab into Howard's right ear, removing it and sniffing it. "No infection." She dropped that swab into one of the clean jars that Uzziel had at the ready, then wiped out the other ear and, with a fresh swab, inspected Howard's nose and mouth. "He was fond of snuff I see and he was just getting over a bad cold, but there is no blood in the mucus, which suggests there was no concussion. The kicks to the side of the head, although severe, were not the *coup de grâce* ; most likely, he would not have died from them if he had not been stabbed. The cause of death was undoubtedly the massive bleeding from the carotid artery. Will you help me turn him over, Mr. Murdoch? No, it's all right, father. We can do it."

Murdoch took hold of one arm and leg and pulled, as she simultaneously pushed from the other side and they rolled the body onto its stomach.

"Other than lividity staining, there are no marks." She took another swab and inserted it into the anus.

"There was a loosening of the bowels and the bladder, but that is to be expected." She wiped her hands on her apron. "Let's reverse him again, Mr. Murdoch."

They did so.

She nodded over at Cavendish. "Will you take your photographs now, Mr. Cavendish, before I begin the dissection. I'd like three or four pictures of the head wound as close up as you can get it and the insertion point of the letter opener." She pointed to one of the shelves. "The weapon is over there on a linen cloth. You might as well take a picture of that as well."

The photographer began to set up his equipment, and the two doctors retreated to a corner of the room to confer over Uzziel's notes. Murdoch went to the shelf where he could see Howard's clothes had been piled and tagged. Every item of clothing was bloodstained, including the one-piece undergarment. His suit was worsted but not of especially high quality. His white cravat was fine silk, but his shirt collar was starting to fray at the neck and had already been turned once. Murdoch took a closer look at the tear in the waistcoat. The pocket where he'd kept his watch was slightly stretched. A large watch then. The trouser pockets were empty except for a crumpled and stained white handkerchief and a wrapped cough lozenge. He wore leather suspenders for his trousers and New York garters of an atypical cherry red, kept up his socks that were darned at the heels. His wife or the maid had made sure he went out into the world well brushed and mended, but either from moral conviction or financial necessity, Reverend Howard had not been extravagant in his attire.

Cavendish had finished and he backed off to the far corner of the room with his equipment. He might still be needed, but this next part was nothing he liked.

Dr. Ogden walked over to the table and her father hopped onto the stool.

"I'm going to commence the dissection now, Mr. Murdoch. Am I correct in assuming you will not faint on me like a green boy?"

"I have seen other post-mortem examinations, ma'am. You don't have to worry about me."

He hoped that was true. It wasn't as if he watched a scalpel slicing into dead flesh every day. Dr. Ogden wheeled over a small table on which she'd fastened her surgical instruments in loops on a roll of cloth. She selected a scalpel and tested it on her thumb.

"You need some more chloride of lime," said her father. "It's starting to pong in here." He went to a bucket in the corner of the room. While he was doing that, Dr. Ogden leaned over and made a Y-shaped incision from Howard's shoulders, down the breast bone to the top of the pubes. Then she pulled back the skin and flesh as if she were opening a valise. All of Howard's inner organs were exposed.

"Clippers please, father."

Uzziel handed her what looked like a pair of pruning shears, and with the decisive, vigorous snips of an assured gardener, Julia cut through the cartilage attaching the ribs to the sternum.

"Saw, please."

Except that it was clean and shiny, the saw looked to Murdoch exactly like the kind of tool used to cut branches. Dr. Ogden sawed through the ribs, dropping the cutoff bones into a dish. She acted quickly and efficiently and Murdoch was glad when she'd finished. The sound was not pleasant. That done, she picked up a long scalpel and severed the valves that connected the heart to the bloodways of the body, then she lifted out the organ from the chest cavity and placed it in a dish that her father had ready for her. There it sat, an inert piece of red meat, once the source of all Howard's fears, angers, and passions. In spite of what he'd said earlier, Murdoch felt a rush of bile come into his mouth.

"Are you all right, detective?"

"Yes, ma'am."

She looked at him kindly. "My tutor used to think we should hang up a sign in the morgue. *Hic locus est ubi mors gaudet succurrere vitae* . Or to translate, 'This is the place where death rejoices to teach those who live.'"

Ah, but what is the lesson? Murdoch thought.

Chapter Thirteen

"HERE YOU GO , WILL. This'll wake you up."

Sergeant Charlie Seymour plonked down a mug of steaming tea on the table. Murdoch could see that he'd made the pot of tea so strong, a spoon would stand up in it, but he didn't mind. He needed it. He yawned again and Seymour laughed.

"If you don't stop that, you'll set me going too and I've got a few more hours on my shift to go."

They were sitting in the duty room where the officers were allowed to have their meals. Seymour looked tired. All of the police sergeants worked twenty-four hours at a time. One turn of duty on, one off. If the station was quiet, they could nap during the night but never for more than two hours at a stretch. He sat down across from Murdoch, who was cautiously sipping at the tea.

"Did anything come out of the post-mortem examination?" Seymour asked.

"Not unless you count the smell that's stuck in my nostrils. The doctor said she thought Howard had been kicked at least three times. The wound to the neck killed him, but he would have lasted a few minutes probably before he died."

"Poor soul. Not the way he expected to go out, I'll wager. What about the search of the church? Did that bring us anything?"

"About two dollars in coins, two lady's handkerchiefs, both silk, three men's umbrellas, and four different ear bobs, which had fallen under the pews. Nothing that seems important."

Seymour had a thick slice of meat pie on a plate in front of him and he stuffed a forkful into his mouth. "Delicious," he mumbled.

"Katie's?"

"Hmm." He wiped away some crumbs from his moustache. "Crabtree should be due in soon. He was doing house to house along Gerrard Street with Fyfer. Dewhurst and Birney were both doing Jarvis Street."

"Tell them I'd like to talk to each of them when they report in. I'm going to check on the reverend's relief list. I don't know how long I'll be, but they'll have to wait for me even if their shift is over. I also have a list of the casuals who were taken into the House of Industry last week, but tracking them down is going to be a headache."

"Do you think the inspector is going to assign us more men?" Seymour asked. "It's a bloody large area to cover."

"That's it for now."

"I don't understand him sometimes. The pastor's death is the biggest news the city has seen for months, you'd think he'd throw everybody into the investigation."

Murdoch sighed. "He always wants to appear self-sufficient to the rest of the police nobs, if you ask me. And as you know he hates spending money. He won't pay for extra shift work if he can avoid it."

"Right, but I noticed he had a new filing cabinet delivered the other day. His other one looked fine to me."

"Hey, mine is falling apart, perhaps I can nab it myself. Where is it?"

"Out in the stables."

"Anyway, Charlie, do your best with what we've got. I'll also put an advertisement in the newspapers, see if anybody comes forward. We'll get that in tomorrow's editions."

"Do you want a pipe before you go?" Seymour asked as he took out his own bag of tobacco.

"No thanks, Charlie. I'd better kick off."

In fact, Murdoch had decided to give up his pipe smoking for Lent, but he felt rather uncomfortable telling Seymour. He wasn't sure himself why he was doing it as he was more and more alienated from the practices of his church. Somehow, however, he could accept the notion of a small sacrifice to remember a greater one. Besides, not many women liked the smell of tobacco on a man's clothes and breath.

Murdoch shoved a piece of paper across the table. "This is a list of applicants for city relief that Howard visited on Monday. I'm going to start with the four he turned down, but there's nothing to say somebody on the list didn't have a miff at him. Maybe they didn't get everything they asked for. Two soup tickets instead of three. It matters when you're starving. Any names you recognize?"

Seymour studied the list. "Coady, of course. He's a guest of the city on a regular basis, but I can't see him murdering anybody. He's too drunk to stand most of the time ... there's nobody else that I know." He stood up. "Heck, I wasn't watching the time. I'd better get back to the desk. Best of luck." He crammed the tobacco pouch in his pocket and left.

Murdoch lingered for a few moments, enjoying the warmth of the fire on his back. The station cat was rubbing her head vigorously against his leg.

"All right, Puss, all right. You'll wear a hole in my trousers at that rate." He pushed back his chair and the cat gave a loud meow of triumph and ran ahead to the cupboard beside the fireplace where the milk was kept. Murdoch followed her, took out the bottle of milk, and poured some into her saucer. "There. And when you've finished how about doing some work. I found some little black droppings in my cupboard this morning and you know what that means, don't you?"

The cat ignored him.

The first name on the list was the Gleeson family, who lived in a small workman's cottage on Wellesley Street. As Murdoch leaned his wheel against the curb, he could hear the sounds of an angry squabble going on inside, children, from the pitch of the voices. Then the front door was flung open and a boy ran out, a bigger boy close behind him. They both collided with Murdoch. He went to grab hold of the smaller lad, but he squirmed away and took off down the street, running hard. This was no happy game Murdoch had interrupted. The older boy hesitated, torn between his anger and a quick fear about the visitor's presence. Murdoch relieved him of the choice by blocking his path.

"I'm looking for Mr. Gleeson. Is he your pa?"

The boy didn't respond to the question but managed to slip in a shrewd appraisal of Murdoch. He didn't like what he saw and he began to back away, hands held out in supplication.

"I don't know nothing, mister."

"Who was that boy you were so intent on killing? Is he your brother?"

A reluctant nod. "He took my last piece of sausage."

Murdoch fished in his pocket and brought out a twenty-five-cent piece.

"Here. I'd rather you go buy yourself another sausage than be guilty of homicide."

The boy accepted the money and stepped back immediately in case Murdoch should change his mind.

"Thanks, mister."

"Is there anybody else in the house?"

The boy's expression became opaque. "My ma and pa are, but they're both taking a short kip right now."

"Unfortunately, I'll have to wake them up. I have some important business I need to discuss with them."

"Are you a bailiff?"

"No. I'm a detective. I'm not going to report them to anybody, I just need to ask some questions."

“What about?”

“Before I answer that, how about telling me your name.”

Reluctantly, the boy answered. “I’m Jethro.”

“Jethro Gleeson?”

A brief nod as if even that much commitment was dangerous.

“Did you ever meet Reverend Howard, Jethro? He would have come to see about your pa’s request for relief.”

That was easy. Jethro shrugged. “I don’t know nothing.”

Murdoch sighed. “All right then, my lad. Why don’t you go and get your meat pie or sausage or whatever you want while I talk to your ma and pa.”

Jethro was probably about ten years old, skinny and dirty-faced. His trousers were too short and his shirt had big holes in it. He smelled of neglect. It was far too cold to be out long without a coat, but Murdoch guessed the boy didn’t own one. He dipped into his pocket again.

“Here’s another two cents. Have some gravy as well. Go on, get off with you.”

Jethro didn’t wait to be told a second time and he bolted down the street. Murdoch watched him go for a moment then walked up to the house.

The boys had left the door open and Murdoch stepped into the dank, stinking interior. It was gloomy, no candles or lamps, and only a dull fire in the grate. He could just make out two lumpy forms on the bed in the corner. He walked over to them. Mr. and Mrs. Gleeson, lying curled up together in sodden intimacy. The smell was vile. Unwashed linen, stale beer. He grabbed the man’s shoulder and shook it hard.

“Mr. Gleeson, wake up. Mr. Gleeson.”

The man stirred, mumbled, saw Murdoch leaning over him and went from drunk to sober in a matter of seconds.

“Who’re you?”

“My name’s Murdoch. I’m a detective. I need to ask you some questions.”

"I don't know nothing about it."

Murdoch almost smiled. "I haven't said what it is yet." He moved away from the bed more for his own self-preservation. "I'd like you to wake your wife and to sit up."

Both commands were easier said than done. Gleeson was pinned under the heavy embrace of his wife, who was locked in a deep stupor. Finally, he got out from underneath her arm, sat up, and started to shake her.

"Mags. There's a frog, er, officer here who wants to talk to us. Get up, old girl. Come on." His rather endearing tone was for Murdoch's benefit and it didn't last. When his wife showed no signs of responding, Gleeson, in exasperation, suddenly pinched her nose closed and the consequent spluttering and gasping for breath jolted the woman awake. She hauled herself more upright. It was a ludicrous scene. The two of them still in bed, nightcaps on, dirty quilt pulled up to their chins, Murdoch standing at the bedside like an invalid's solicitous visitor. Or two invalids, in this case. He decided that making them get dressed would be more trouble than it was worth.

"You recently applied for relief, I understand."

"Thas right."

Murdoch could see Gleeson struggle to assess whether this question boded well or ill.

"I'm sorry to inform you that your Visitor, the Reverend Howard, has been killed."

A pause, more from puzzlement than fear or guilt.

"Whatch ya mean, killed. Was he run over or something?"

"No. Somebody stabbed him, then kicked him in the head."

Definitely fear now. Even Mrs. Gleeson seemed to comprehend what Murdoch had said.

"We don't know nothing about that. We didn't do anything to him, did we, Mags?"

Still mute, she shook her head then winced.

"Why're you telling us?" Gleeson asked, recovering a certain belligerence that Murdoch suspected was his habitual manner.

"I understand your application was rejected by the minister."

"It was, but that don't mean I up and killed him. I'd have 'alf the city dead if I followed that line."

"Where were you Tuesday afternoon?"

"Here in bed like always."

"What do you mean, like always."

Margaret Gleeson found her tongue at last. Her voice was roughened. "Show him, Tom."

Gleeson pulled back the quilt and for a moment Murdoch almost flinched. The man's feet were swollen to twice their size and a livid purple colour. In a couple of places, the skin had ulcerated.

"He can't hardly get himself to the chamber pot," said his wife.

"What about you, ma'am? Where were you yesterday afternoon?" Murdoch said. He saw the glance of triumph that flashed between them. They'd got him.

"I was in bed beside him," she answered. "See," and she too pulled back the quilt. She was in a state of advanced pregnancy. "I've got to rest my legs." She raised her stained nightgown so Murdoch could see the purple swollen veins, snaking up from her ankles. She patted her mound of a belly. "I've lost two before this one, so I've got to be careful."

Murdoch felt like yelling at her that sobriety might help the unborn even more than lying in bed, but he held his tongue.

"What can you tell me about Reverend Howard's visit?"

"Not much. It didn't matter to him that Mags here is expecting and I can't work. He's a nob. They're all nobs and they don't give a piss for people like us. If we starve to death, we're one less name on the books as far as they're

concerned. He didn't stay long. Just said that he couldn't give us any tickets. We'd have to find another source of charity."

Gleeson hawked and spat on the floor, just missing Murdoch's boots. He'd seen his own father do that many a time and he'd heard that tone of voice before. Aggrieved, self-righteous, defiant. *He used to be a good man, Will*, his mother had whispered to him once as he lay in bed smarting from the most recent beating. *Try not to think too harshly of him. He just can't abide it when you talk to him that way. He sees his own failure*.

Murdoch had been full of helpless rage and in no mood for forgiveness. He could feel that old anger stirring at the back of his mind, stiffening his neck in a way he had no control over.

"You seem to have found enough money to buy drink," he said. "You could have got food instead."

Gleeson didn't answer, but somewhere in his ruin of a face Murdoch saw a glimpse of desperation. They were both beyond redemption, but they also had two sons and a baby imminent. He felt disgusted with them and with himself for having a reaction he had tried so desperately for years to control.

"Listen. I'm not going to give you money, but I'm going down to the pie shop at the corner and I'll have them send down some bread and soup."

Margaret looked as if she were going to thank him, but Gleeson gave him a vile, unrepentant glare. Murdoch dropped a dollar bill on the table.

"Kill yourself then."

Chapter Fourteen

THOMAS COATES WAS ALSO DRUNK , but his wife was sober, as were his four children, all of them huddled around a tiny fire in the dark backroom of a house on Bleeker Street. He had nothing to say about his Visitor except that Reverend Howard didn't understand how hard things had been for him with a bad back and no work. He was a whiner, but the children were obviously in dire straits, Murdoch wondered why Howard hadn't granted them relief. He supposed he was under strict orders to refuse tickets to anybody who was undeserving, that is, a drunkard and a malingerer. Murdoch left a dollar with Mrs. Coates, who immediately hid it in her apron pocket. He felt confident that she and the children at least would have supper that night.

Miss Mary Hanrahan's room was filthy. She didn't seem to understand any of his questions and she reeked of stale beer, but Murdoch wondered if her lack of coherence was caused by something else. She seemed lost and frail and in need of care. He crossed her off his list of possible assailants. Even in a rage of disappointment, she couldn't have overcome a healthy man like Howard; she could hardly walk. He left her a dollar bill on her table.

The fourth name on his list was Mrs. Esther Tugwell, who lived on Sherbourne Street at the boundary of Howard's district. As he approached the dilapidated house in the deepening gloom of the early evening, Murdoch wondered how much *this* visit was going to cost him. He didn't have much money left. Each window had a different covering, from what looked like a tablecloth to a proper blind so he knew there were several tenants living in a house that was

small to begin with. He wasn't surprised there was no bell and he banged hard on the door that hadn't seen paint for many years. No answer. The butler's day off, he said wryly to himself. He turned the doorknob and stepped into a dark hallway that was fetid with neglect and the odour of many years of unwholesome meals. He waited for a moment until his eyes grew accustomed to the gloom but realized he was going to need some light. He went back to where he'd left his bicycle, removed the lamp from the handlebars, and went back inside the house.

The beam of light revealed a bare wooden floor and grimy walls. His light picked out a well-polished brass plate on the nearest door, shining like a piece of gold on a midden heap. The plate read, THOMAS HICKS, ESQUIRE . He could hear a low murmur coming from inside the room but only one voice as far as he could tell.

Murdoch rapped on the door and the murmuring stopped abruptly.

"Yes?" It was a man's frail voice.

"Mr. Hicks, I'm a policeman. I'm looking for Mrs. Esther Tugwell."

Various creaks then the sound of a bolt being shot back. The door opened a crack and the face of an elderly man peered out at him. Murdoch had expected a sullen response, but the man actually beamed at him, revealing yellow teeth as prominent in his gaunt face as those of an old horse's.

"Come in, come in." He stepped back and beckoned Murdoch into his room. "Have a seat, sir." Hicks suffered from a severe curvature of the spine, which brought his chin close to his chest and movement was obviously difficult for him. He shuffled over to the table in the middle of the room, removed a newspaper from a chair, and pulled it out. "I must apologize for the untidiness of my abode, sir, but I don't receive many visitors, especially illustrious members of the city's police force." Hicks's voice was that of an

educated Englishman and at first glance, his abode, as he called it, resembled the private library of an aristocrat. Tall bookcases lined the three windowless walls. There was a comfortable armchair in front of the fire and a faint smell of singed leather suggested Mr. Hicks had been propping his slippered feet on the fender. A brass oil lamp on the table cast a warm glow. However, as his host fussed with the chair, Murdoch had an opportunity to observe a little more closely. There was a simple couch in the corner, which was presumably where Mr. Hicks slept, and next to it a washstand. Two worn druggets were on the planked floor and the window had a decent-enough blind, but it was obvious that if Thomas Hicks, Esquire had ever, in fact, been affluent, he was no longer so.

The chair cleared of newspaper, the man offered his hand.

"Thomas Hicks at your service, sir."

"Murdoch. William Murdoch. I'm a detective at number four station."

"Ah, yes, I know it well," said Hicks ambiguously. He waved in the direction of the hearth where there was a kettle steaming on the hob. "I was just about to prepare some tea when you knocked. May I offer you some?"

Murdoch was about to refuse, but he knew the man's eagerness was a measure of his loneliness.

"Thank you kindly. It's damably cold out there and a hot cup of char would hit the spot. As long as it's no bother."

"Not at all. Not at all. I always have my tea at this time." Hicks flashed his powerful teeth again. "It is probably not such a good thing to be a creature of habit the way I am, but ever since my dear wife passed away, I find it a comfort to continue with our little customs." He tapped on the table. "She would sit here and I in my armchair and we would read to each other, often for hours."

Murdoch glanced at the bookshelf behind him, which was lined with leatherbound books stamped with gilt letters. "I see you read German."

Hicks was busy pouring boiling water from the kettle on the hob into his teapot. "Alas no, sir. To be frank I got all of the books on that shelf as part of a job lot from a gentleman's estate. I find to be surrounded by books, no matter what language, is like being in the middle of a company of loving friends." He brought the teapot to the table, which was covered with a too big but clean red damask cloth. "The two shelves just above your head are also from an estate. They were going to be thrown away. They're written in a language I don't recognize. Portuguese perhaps and I do believe they are medical textbooks." He chuckled. "I think they must have belonged to a specialist in diseases of the skin, the illustrations are quite gruesome."

There was a book turned face down on the table, which was the one Murdoch presumed Mr. Hicks had been reading aloud.

"Ah yes. That is a book of sermons, which was kindly lent to me." His lined face looked wistful in the shadowy light. "I do sometimes pine for the robust humour of Mr. Dickens or the rollicking yarns of Mr. Scott, but as they say beggars can't be choosers." He spoke about the books the way another person might describe missing a tasty roast beef or apple tart. "The public library is farther than I can manage in the wintertime. But soon it will be spring and things will improve considerably."

He took two cups without saucers from the cupboard in the washstand and poured them each some weak tea.

"I'm afraid I cannot offer you milk or sugar, Mr. Murdoch, but I'd be more than happy to share my biscuit with you."

"No, really, sir. I prefer my tea this way."

Mr. Hicks took a sip with the slow appreciation of a man who is forced to apportion out meagre amounts to himself. Murdoch didn't know what had brought the old man to this state of poverty and he wasn't about to ask for his life history, but he found himself running through his own mind some way he could help financially without offending Mr.

Hicks's pride. Oh Lord, he hadn't even got past the first tenant. He put down his cup.

"I am actually looking for a Mrs. Esther Tugwell. This is her address, I understand?"

Hicks's eyes flickered. "That's quite correct. She lives directly above me." At that moment, they heard the creak of floorboards from overhead as somebody walked across the floor. "That is no doubt she. She is a hardworking soul, a seamstress by trade, who takes care of her invalid son. She also has a daughter. She ..." He drank more tea and didn't finish the sentence. Murdoch had the sense he had more to say but chose not to. "My immediate neighbours are the Misses Leask, Emma and Larissa. Next to the Tugwells are Mr. and Mrs. McGillivray, a young couple who are expecting their first child soon. Then on the top floor we have Mr. and Mrs. Einboden, recently arrived from Germany, and Mr. Taylor, who is a bachelor and quite reclusive alas." He grinned. "We are quite crammed to the rafters, you might say. But we do look out for each other when we can."

Murdoch put his cup on the table. At least the tea had been hot. "I wonder if I might ask you one or two questions, Mr. Hicks?"

"My pleasure, sir."

"Did you ever meet the Reverend Howard?"

Hicks smiled at him.

"Oh yes. He is a Visitor from the city relief fund and Miss Leask needed help, as, I believe, did poor Mrs. Tugwell. I was calling on her the first time he came and he kindly furnished me with Dr. Lanceley's book. We had the most entertaining conversation for almost an hour."

Something in Murdoch's expression must have communicated itself and Hicks frowned. "Why are you asking, sir? Is there something wrong?"

"I'm afraid so." There was no way Murdoch could soften the reality of what had happened. He said quietly. "Mr. Howard has been murdered."

Hicks gaped at him. "How can that be? He was the kindest of men."

Kindness was not unfortunately always a protection against violence, thought Murdoch. "His body was found in his office yesterday. We believe he may have surprised a burglar."

The old man pulled out a handkerchief from his pocket and blew his nose vigorously so Murdoch wouldn't see his eyes had filled with tears. "I had such expectations we would become friends. He was a most lively conversationalist."

"I intend to find the perpetrator, Mr. Hicks."

"Even if you do, and I have every confidence that you will, it won't bring him back, will it? I cannot say I knew him well, but I do believe that Reverend Howard was one of those rare human beings who is truly good."

He was stroking the cover of the book as he spoke, as if it brought him closer to the man who had loaned it to him.

"I'm very sorry to have brought you such bad news, Mr. Hicks," said Murdoch, "but the reason I am here is because Mr. Howard was, as you say, a relief officer. I want to speak to the people on his list."

Hicks glanced over at Murdoch sharply. "Do you suspect one of them to be his killer?"

"I have no suspects at the moment. But it's regular procedure to follow up on the victim's movements prior to his death. He made his rounds on Monday. Did you speak to him at all?"

Hicks shook his head. "Unfortunately, he must have been too busy to drop by."

He averted his eyes, a man accustomed to people being too busy.

"Did he visit Mrs. Tugwell?"

"I assume he did. I thought I heard him come in and go upstairs, but I haven't spoken to her so I cannot say for certain."

Murdoch hesitated. "Did Mrs. Tugwell or Miss Leask ever say anything to you that would indicate they were angry with Reverend Howard?"

Hicks pulled his lips over his prominent teeth. "Not at all. Absolutely not. I know that he was unable to give Mrs. Tugwell a docket, but she never spoke a word against him. She knew all too well why she was turned down."

"Why was she?"

Hicks cocked his head at Murdoch. "Are you going to speak to her directly?"

"Yes."

"Then you will see for yourself and it's far better that you do than I say a word."

Murdoch got to his feet, picking up his bicycle lamp and his hat. "Thank you so much for the tea, Mr. Hicks."

"You are most welcome, sir. But tell me, has a date been established for Reverend Howard's funeral?"

"Not yet. It will have to wait until after the coroner's inquest. But I will make a point of informing you."

This elicited from Hicks another clearing of his nose into the handkerchief. They shook hands again and Murdoch stepped out, back into the dank hallway.

Chapter Fifteen

MURDOCH FOLLOWED THE BEAM of his lamp up the uncarpeted stairs to the landing. Here there were two doors and at the far end a farther flight of even narrower stairs led to the third floor. A sliver of light was showing underneath the first door, but before he could knock, it opened and a woman emerged. She was dressed in a brown coat, plain enough, but enlivened by a wispy purple feather boa and a beribboned red hat. He presumed this young woman was the problematic daughter. She was young, but any prettiness she might have had was obliterated by the anger held in her mouth and eyes. She flashed him a tawdry seductive smile.

"What can I do for you? Lost your way, I'll wager. I'll help you find it if you like."

"I'd like to speak to Mrs. Esther Tugwell."

The false smile vanished immediately. "You a bailiff?"

"No. My name is Murdoch, I'm a detective at number four station."

Now he saw an all too familiar look. Fear, hostility, wariness. He met it all the time.

"What you want with my ma?"

Her tone of voice was so belligerent, Murdoch felt his own flash of temper.

"As I said, I'd like to talk to her. Are you Josephine Tugwell?"

"The same. And as I just said, what you want with us?"

"I'm investigating a murder and I'd like to ask her some questions."

“Ha. Who the hell’s got the big bird that my mother’d know anything about it? She never leaves the house.”

In spite of her question, Murdoch thought she wasn’t surprised to see him and she did know why he was here. Then he recognized her. She was the woman in the red hat who’d taken exception to Crabtree as he came through the crowd outside the church. She must know that Charles Howard was dead.

“Didn’t I see you at Chalmers Church yesterday afternoon?”

For a split second, she considered her answer. Then she shrugged. “Your peepers do not deceive. I came over to see what the fuss was all about.”

“So you do know who got the big bird?”

“Didn’t have to be him, did it? There could be a cove doffed every hour for all I know. What’s it to do with my ma?”

“Reverend Howard was a Visitor for the House of Industry. Your mother is on his list. I understand he turned down her application for relief.”

“He did. Man with a poker up his arse, as far as I could tell. He thought I wasn’t deserving so the rest of the family could go starve. But I hope you ain’t thinking my own mother did for him cos she was miffed?”

“I have no thoughts at the moment. I’m interviewing everybody who was on Reverend Howard’s list.”

“That’s a clever thing to do. The prospect of some soft-handed toff having the say-so as to whether you eat for the next month could get a person all riled, couldn’t it?”

“Do I take that to mean you don’t have a high opinion of Reverend Howard?”

“I don’t have an opinion, high or low. He looked down his nose same as all of them.”

“Your downstairs neighbour, Mr. Hicks, thought he was a good man.”

“That’s Christian of him.”

Josie had doused herself with some kind of strong musky scent that was overpowering in the small space of the landing.

"Given what you just said, I'd like to ask you where you were yesterday afternoon, round about three-thirty," Murdoch said.

"That's a laugh. I was here, shivering myself to death. Why? Don't think I went up there and stabbed the bloke so I could get blood out of a stone, do ya?" She laughed at her own joke.

She was getting on Murdoch's nerves. "Show some respect, young woman, or I'll bring you into the station. Besides, how did you know he'd been stabbed?"

She grinned. "You didn't say so, if that's what you're getting at, but that's what everybody was nattering about up at the church. He'd bin stabbed and the boots put to him, from what I heard."

The door behind her opened and a thin-faced woman poked her head out.

"Josie, what's going on? You're disturbing Wilf."

"Sorry, ma. I was talking to the detective here. He's come to take you to jail."

Mrs. Tugwell was an older, worn version of her daughter, the same narrow nose and sharp chin but without the bold, defiant expression. She looked frightened at Josie's words.

"What for?"

Murdoch tipped his hat to her. "Your daughter is teasing you, ma'am. That's not the reason I'm here, ma'am. I am investigating the murder of the Reverend Howard. I would like to ask you some questions."

Esther glanced at Josie nervously and her daughter sighed impatiently.

"I ain't never going to get out of here. You'd better let him in, Ma. Don't worry, I'll come too and make sure he don't knock you about."

Mrs. Tugwell backed into the room, Josie went in, and Murdoch was left to follow her. The air was unpleasantly close and the front windows were uncurtained and grimy. Underneath them was what seemed to be the only real chair in the place. A couple of packing boxes served as seats. Even those meagre furnishings made the room seem crowded because most of the space was taken up by the stove and the family bed. On the floor was a pallet where he could make out a boy's sleeping form.

Mrs. Tugwell spoke softly. "That there's our Wilf. He's got St. Vitus's dance, so I'll thank you not to raise your voice. Any loud noise sets him going."

Josie plopped on one of the boxes. "I'd offer you some tea, but we drank the last of it this morning. And I hope you ain't hungry because the larder is empty. So you'll just have to forgive our bad manners. We wasn't expecting company."

Murdoch knew quite well she was baiting him, but he felt a pang of pity. Their state was every bit as wretched as the others he'd seen. Esther fluttered around and pulled the chair closer into the room.

"Why don't you sit here, officer."

She sat down on the other box and Murdoch accepted the chair. The two women were lower and close to his knees, which made him feel like a schoolmaster addressing his pupils.

"Reverend Howard came here on Monday afternoon, I understand?" he spoke to Esther Tugwell although he could tell that the real authority in the family was Josie. It was she who answered.

"That's right. He stayed for what, Ma? Ten minutes. Decided we weren't deserving of no meal ticket and shoved off."

"He told you right away, did he?"

"Oh yes. They have to. Gives you a chance to go somewhere else. We went to the Sisters, who at least have some charity."

“How did you feel when the pastor told you he wasn’t going to grant your application?”

Both women looked at Murdoch in astonishment, then Josie laughed.

“How’d you think we felt? Use your noggin. Three mouths to feed, no coal even if we did have food. Wilf is sickly, as you can see. What you think? We were happy as larks.” She slapped her knee. “Wait a bleeding minute. I thought you even gave a toss. But you mean, did we want to kill the bleeder? Well I know I did. What do you say, Ma?”

Esther shrank. She was wearing a brown velvet wrapper that must have been passed on to her from a charity. It was too big and the shoulders drooped down her arms.

“He was only doing his job, Jo. He was a good man, really.”

Josie glared at her. Not said but hanging in the air was the knowledge that she was the reason they had been turned down.

“My mother’s a real Christian, Mr. Murdoch. She thinks Old Nick himself is only doing his job when he roasts sinners in hell.”

Her tone was cruel and Esther flushed. “Josie, that’s not true.” She turned to Murdoch. “We was disappointed of course we were, but like Jo just said we was able to go to the Sisters.”

“And Monday was the last time you saw Reverend Howard?”

Josie jumped in. “Of course it was, Mr. Sly Boots. He wasn’t likely to drop in for supper, was he? Yesterday was Tuesday, and Tuesday was when he was went to the Grand Silence.”

Murdoch looked at the older woman, who’d folded her hands into the sleeves of her too big dress. “Is that the truth, Mrs. Tugwell?”

She nodded. Murdoch might have pressed her but at that moment, the boy on the pallet groaned. His arm jerked out from the blanket covering him. Esther got to her feet quickly and went to him.

“He’s awake, is he? Mama’s here, lambie.” Her voice was tender when she spoke and Murdoch saw the anger flit across Josie’s face. She’d seen that tenderness lavished on her brother all her life, something she wanted and didn’t get. She jumped to her feet.

“If you’re done now, mister, I’ll be off.” She gave him an unabashed leer. “I’m meeting a friend and I’m late already.”

Murdoch didn’t think he was going to get any further and he wanted to get out of the stifling atmosphere of oppressive poverty. Wilf was making strangled noises and his arms were jerking wildly. Esther understood what he was trying to say and she fetched a mug of soup from the stove.

“Here, lambie. I saved it for you.”

Murdoch stood up.

“I’ll be going now, Mrs. Tugwell, but I may have to come back.”

“She’ll be here,” said Josie. “She never goes out. She’s always worried about brother Wilf.”

Esther straightened up and gave Murdoch a wan smile. “I’m sorry I can’t be more help, sir. I’m sorry to hear about the pastor. He seemed like a kind man.”

Josie snorted derisively. “Kind, my arse. He didn’t care if we were starving.”

Her mother sighed and turned back to helping Wilf with his soup.

Josie grabbed Murdoch by his sleeve and grinned up into his face. “Now why don’t you do me a favour, mister, and light the way down the stairs so I don’t trip and break my bleeding neck.”

Murdoch followed her from the room, leaving Mrs. Tugwell to minister to the skeleton-thin, twitching boy.

Chapter Sixteen

MURDOCH CALLED ON SEVEN other applicants on his list, all of them “approved.” Only one of these, a man with a broken leg, whined that Howard had not given him as much help as he needed and he was worried that the pastor’s death might slow down his ongoing application for relief. There were few comments from the others, who all had learned to be wary of policemen asking questions. Self-interest was uppermost and they were all concerned about who would take over now that Howard was dead. “He treated me like I were a real person, not a number on a list, the way most of them do,” said one woman who was close to her confinement and no husband in sight. By eight o’clock, Murdoch was tired and ravenous. He decided to start fresh in the morning and finish for the day.

As he got to his lodgings, he could see there was a party going on. The curtains were not yet drawn in the front parlour and light was spilling out onto the street. All the movable furniture had been pushed back to the walls. Amy was standing on a chair with her hands cupped in a whistling position and Seymour and Katie were executing an energetic, if constricted two step in the tiny space in the centre of the room. Murdoch could hear Seymour’s whoops and Katie’s laughter. He stepped up to the window and, leaning in close, rapped hard. Seymour waved, twirled his partner wildly, and they both dropped breathlessly onto the couch. Amy stopped whistling, jumped off the chair, and beckoned to Murdoch to come in. She was wearing the smock and pantaloons that she favoured for home.

Perversely, he felt a pang at the scene as if he were an outsider, the hungry boy at the butcher's shop window. He let himself into the hall, hung up his hat and coat, and opened the door to the parlour. Seymour greeted him with more exuberance than Murdoch had ever seen him express before.

"Will, come in. Katie and I just did a Scottish reel, would you believe? At least I think it was a reel. I know there was a lot of leaping about on the part of my partner and I just tried to imitate her as best I could."

Katie, who usually looked pale and worried, was flushed with the exertion, her hair dishevelled and her eyes shining. Murdoch saw how pretty she could be when she wasn't weighed down with the care of her children.

"Miss Slade is as good as an entire military band," she laughed. "And I was not leaping about, as you put it, Charlie. You have to do pirouettes."

"It certainly looked energetic at least," said Murdoch. "The entire street was enjoying the show."

"Oh dear, I'd better draw the curtains," said Katie and she hurried to do so.

"Why don't you have a go, Will," said Seymour. "Katie can manage another dance, I'm sure."

Murdoch backed away. "Not tonight, thanks. I'd be worse than a sack of potatoes."

They all sensed the change of mood he'd brought into the room but mistook the reason for it.

"You look famished," said Katie. "Come into the kitchen and I'll get you your supper. I made a pork hash tonight and I know you like that."

Murdoch glanced around the room. "Where are the boys?"

"In my room," answered Amy. "They're sleeping soundly."

"Not for long, I'm afraid," said Katie. "They're teething and it's making them mardy. I hope we won't disturb you tonight."

"I think I'll sleep like a log, don't worry."

A wailing from the other room corroborated Katie's statement and she laughed. "I'll tend to them and be with you in a minute, Mr. Murdoch."

"I can handle it myself, Katie, don't worry."

"I'll keep you company," said Seymour. "Are you coming too, Amy?"

She shook her head. "I have to prepare my lessons for tomorrow."

Murdoch felt a pang of disappointment, which he quickly suppressed. "What are you going to do with the little arabs?"

"I was going to teach some Canadian literature for a change, but the inspector will be dropping in this week so I had better impress him." Amy had strong views about the school system and had got into hot water a couple of times for criticizing the curriculum. "I'll have to find yet another poem about the lovely birds and woods of England." She clasped her hands together, blew through her laced fingers, and made a few birdlike trills.

Murdoch and Seymour applauded her, then reluctantly Murdoch followed his friend to the kitchen, which was fragrant with the smell of fried onions.

He took the plate from the oven. His dinner was strips of pork from the previous night's roast, cooked with fried onions and served with generous helpings of boiled cabbage and potatoes. He sat down at the place prepared for him. Seymour took the chair across from him.

"Any progress?"

"None at all, I regret to say. As far as I can tell he didn't have an enemy in the world. He was a saint walking the earth."

"A surprise attack, then? A burglar?"

"Most likely."

Katie came into the room. "They've quieted down. Oh you got your dinner already."

"I did and it smells wonderful, thank you."

“We have a currant pudding for the sweet, so leave a bit of room for that.”

“Katie says it’s called half-pay pudding because it’s cheap to make but it’s delicious,” said Seymour. He smiled so fondly that Murdoch blinked. Good Lord, was the bachelor sergeant falling in love with the young widow? Enid Jones had warned him months ago about affection engendered by proximity not being the same as true love, but he could see why it might happen. Welcome a man home after a long shift of duty, feed him hot tasty food, do his laundry for him, which he knew Katie did, be glad to see him, and before you knew it, romance blossomed.

“I’d better get back,” said Katie. Murdoch noticed how Seymour followed her with his eyes as she left.

The two men talked more about the case while Murdoch ate, then they lingered for an hour to smoke a pipe. Murdoch had been intending to resist the temptation, but the sight and smell of the tobacco was too much and he joined Seymour. Katie did not return and Amy Slade remained in her room. Finally Seymour stood up.

“I’m on duty tomorrow, so I’d better climb the wooden hill. You should too, by the look of you.”

“I will. I’m just digesting my dinner a bit longer.”

“Good night then.”

They shook hands and Seymour left. He didn’t call out a goodnight to Amy, so Murdoch assumed she had extinguished her lamps and gone to bed. He hoped the inspector’s visit would go well. He knew she was an excellent teacher, he’d observed her once or twice before, but she was so radical in her methods that more than once she had upset the school trustees. One of them had heard her whistling to the children and told her dourly, “‘A whistling woman and a crowing hen, is no good to God or men.’”

Amy had laughed at that, but Murdoch knew she’d had to be more careful with what she did in the classroom. And her

clothes. Rational Dress, she called it and she was right it was very sensible and rational for an active woman, but she'd told him that more than once she'd been shouted at by men as she walked home. Murdoch's thoughts jumped to Liza. His fiancée had been radical in many ways too but conservative in others. He suddenly wished he had her photograph in front of him. Her face was becoming less vivid in his mind. It had been more than two years since she had died suddenly from typhoid fever and the feeling of loss came and went in its intensity. Tonight it was acute and he wasn't sure why. Perhaps it was seeing what was happening to Seymour. Did Katie return his affections? She was considerably younger, but Murdoch thought she did have that soft glow about her these days that women get when they are falling in love and are loved in return.

He banged his pipe on the side of the stove to knock out the ashes and went his own way up the wooden hill.

Katie had been right when she warned him about the twins being in the throws of teething. Their intermittent crying had kept him awake most of the night. Finally, at four o'clock he put on his shirt and trousers and went downstairs. As he approached the parlour that was now Katie's room, both boys were in pained and lusty voice. He had to tap on the door twice before it opened a crack and Katie's haggard face peered out.

"Mr. Murdoch, I'm so sorry you've been wakened as well. I can't quiet them no how."

"I thought another pair of hands might help matters."

Katie was holding one of the twins and Murdoch took a quick glance at the baby's clenched fist as he waved it ferociously in the air. James had a small birthmark on his wrist. This was Jacob.

"Why don't I give him a walk around the premises. A change of scene might help."

“Well, I ... oh thank you.” She was too tired to argue. Murdoch put his candlestick on the hall table and accepted the transfer of the tightly wrapped baby.

“I’ll tend to James,” she said and retreated into her room where the other twin was wailing.

Whether from surprise at this new person, or whether he was just too exhausted to carry on, Jacob stopped crying. Gently, Murdoch straightened the baby’s bonnet that had slipped down his forehead and wiped away some of the tears and drool with his cuff. Jacob grabbed his hand and immediately tried to stuff the knuckles into his mouth. Murdoch could feel the bumpy edge of the gums as the baby chomped down. Murdoch started to walk down the hall, jiggling the boy as he did so.

“Teeth are good things on the whole, little fellow. You can get to bite into all sorts of things like apples and pears. The best kind are the ones you can pick right off the tree, even better if the farmer is an old coot who doesn’t want you to. Those taste real good.” He paused and looked into Jacob’s wide eyes. “No, forget I said that. I don’t want you starting into a life of crime. Let’s see, what else? You can eat crusts of bread that are still warm from the oven with fresh butter and a piece of cheese on the top. And sometimes the best thing in the world is a thick pork chop slathered with onions. Hmm, you need teeth to do all that. So this bit of suffering now is going to be worth it.”

He didn’t think this was the time to warn Jacob that later in life teeth could be a big problem if they decayed, as he knew only too well. The baby sniffled a little and looked as if he was going to howl again. Murdoch balanced him in one arm and loosened up the tight blanket.

“How’s that? You seem hot to me.”

Jacob looked into his face with the into-the-soul stare that infants have, but he didn’t cry. By the time they’d made the third trip down the hall, he even seemed to be on the verge of nodding off. With a groan at his aching muscles, Murdoch

shifted him to the other arm, just as the door to Amy's room opened and she emerged, in the red quilted house gown he'd seen her in yesterday.

"William, I didn't expect to see you up at this hour."

"Jacob and I are having a little constitutional. I've been telling him about the value of teeth."

She smiled. "It sounds as if you need to give the same talk to his brother." James was still yelling.

She tapped at Katie's door and went in. Murdoch heard murmured voices, then the baby stopped crying and a few minutes later, Katie emerged.

"Miss Slade has ordered me to go to bed. I'm going to get a little nap in her room. Please wake me in half an hour, Mr. Murdoch. And thank you so much."

She didn't even check her child, the lure of a short sleep propelling her away. She went into Amy's room and closed the door. The house was suddenly quiet. Jacob was asleep, making little snuffling noises and Murdoch withdrew his knuckle, wiping it on his shirt. His arms and back were aching and he suddenly felt desperately tired. He didn't dare go back to Katie's room, where it sounded as if Amy had calmed the other twin, in case they both woke up again. He walked to the hall stand and sat down on the chair next to it. He leaned his head against the wall, wedged the baby in the crook of his arm, and closed his eyes.

He didn't know how long he'd been asleep, but he woke with a start. The light in the hall was the grey of dawn and he saw that his candle had burned down. He was no longer holding Jacob. Somebody had removed the boy from his arms. He sat up straight and almost yelped at the stab of pain from the crick in his neck. The hall was chilly, but there was a cover around his legs and bare feet. He yawned and heard the clock in the kitchen chime the hour. It was six o'clock. Katie's door opened and Amy came out. She was dressed and had even pinned up her hair. He couldn't

believe how fresh she looked considering she too had had a broken night.

“Good morning, William,” she said, speaking in a low voice. “Everybody’s asleep, but I thought I might as well light the stove ready for breakfast.”

He rubbed his neck. “You took Jacob, I assume.”

“Yes, you were both dead to the world. The twins are still sleeping, bless them, and Katie hasn’t moved in the last two hours.”

“What about you? Did you get back to sleep?”

“Not really. When I’m up, I’m up. Why don’t you come down to the kitchen and I’ll make us some tea.”

Stiffly, Murdoch got to his feet. He couldn’t turn his head.

“You look as if you’ve got a crick in your neck,” she said. “Let me get the fire going then I’ll give it a rub. I used to do that for my brothers and I warn you I have fingers of steel.”

“I’ll accept any pain if you can restore my neck to flesh.”

He followed her into the kitchen. In spite of his fatigue and soreness, he was suddenly very happy.

Chapter Seventeen

ALL OF THE DAILY NEWSPAPERS had made headlines of Reverend Howard's murder, so Murdoch wasn't surprised to find the chapel of the funeral parlour packed, the crowd spilling to the outer rooms. He recognized several reporters, notebooks on their laps, who had to a man wedged themselves into the end seats of the rows in order to exit quickly when the verdict was announced. Their young runners were squatting on the floor beside them, ready as hunting dogs. Mr. Royce, the coroner, was seated at a table facing the thirteen members of the jury who were in the first two rows. He was busily filling out his forms. Even an inquest into such a violent murder had its tedious formalities. Murdoch hurried to a bench near the front, which was reserved for witnesses. Constables Dewhurst and Fyfer were already seated beside Dr. Julia Ogden and her father. When Murdoch slid into the remaining empty space, she turned and frowned. He smiled apologetically. Late again. He resisted the impulse to launch into an explanation about being delayed at the station while he had quickly sifted through the reports of the constables who had been on the night shifts. Nobody had reported anything untoward. The east end of the city had been wrapped in virtuous sleep.

The spectators were as quiet as if they were in church and the room was silent except for the odd choked-back cough. Royce was not intimidated by the pressure from the waiting crowd, even though one woman suddenly burst out weeping and at least two others followed suit. Finally, he affixed his seal to the document he'd been filling out, picked up his gavel, and rapped on the table.

“We will begin this inquest conducted by me, Walter Fuller Royce, on behalf of Her Majesty, the Queen. I will ask all of you witnesses to speak clearly and slowly. Remember, I have to write down what you say, as does our clerk.”

Constable Crabtree was standing beside the table, ready to take instruction, and Royce nodded at him. “Call the roll of jurors and make sure they are all present. Then get them to sign their names next to their seal.”

Crabtree did so. “Doctor William Caven, Angus Drummond, Joseph Lyons ...” And so on until all thirteen had called out their varying *presents*. The jurymen on the whole were a well-dressed lot, almost all of them in formal frock coats, even Joseph Lyons, who’d given his occupation as reporter. We could be in a gentleman’s club, thought Murdoch.

Royce raised his hand. “This is a public inquest and we know already that the evidence we will hear from some of the witnesses will be most horrific. I suggest that any of the ladies leave now if they wish. And I will also have the court cleared of the newsboys, who are far too young to be here in the first place.”

There was a sudden rumble of indignation from the reporters. Royce was a retired solicitor and was notoriously hostile to the reporting of criminal cases in the newspapers. He claimed, and rightly, that the reports were invariably both lurid and inaccurate. In retaliation, the reporters were unkind to him in their reports, mocking his bulbous nose and florid features. Murdoch’s sympathies were with the coroner, although he doubted that the newsboys had a sensitive bone in their bodies considering the life they led. There were five of them, each paid a pittance by the reporters to run their stories to the respective newspaper offices in time for the evening edition.

“Come on,” said Royce. “Get those lads out of here. Constable Crabtree, please escort any ladies who wish to leave.”

With a great show of reluctance and much grumbling, the scruffy-looking street arabs reluctantly filed out of the courtroom. Two women in the back row stood up and left.

The coroner consulted his list. "Call the first witness, Miss Sarah Dignam, if you please."

Miss Dignam was at the end of the row, Miss Flowers next to her. At the sound of her name, an elderly man with full side whiskers and shaggy beard, who was seated directly behind her, patted her shoulder solicitously. She got up slowly and walked to the chair beside the table. She was dressed all in black and her felt mourning hat was trimmed with ebony flowers, one of which drooped over the brim to touch her pale face.

"State your name in full, your place of abode, and your occupation," said Royce.

"My name is Sarah Emily Maria Dignam and I live at –"

"Speak up, if you please, ma'am. I can hardly hear you, which means the jury most certainly cannot."

Royce was not a man inclined to sympathy. Miss Dignam shrank down into the chair at the reprimand and repeated her name in a slightly louder voice.

"I live at 420 Jarvis Street, which is one of the row of houses just north of the church."

Royce flashed her an impatient look. "Your occupation, ma'am?"

"I take care of the household for my brother and myself."

"Spinster," he said, making a point of writing that down. "Swear her in, constable."

Crabtree handed Miss Dignam a bible, which she grasped in both gloved hands.

"Raise your right hand, if you please, ma'am. When I've finished, you must answer, *I do*."

The constable smiled kindly at her and Murdoch saw her blink away quick tears.

“Do you, Sarah Emily Maria Dignam, hereby swear that the evidence you shall give to this inquest on behalf of our Sovereign Lady, the Queen, touching the death of Charles Edmund Howard, shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?”

“I do,” whispered Miss Dignam.

The coroner looked as if he was going to order her to speak up again.

“Miss Dignam, I realize, as I’m sure do all the members of the jury, that you have suffered a dreadful shock and that this inquest can only be an ordeal for you. However ... it is our duty to determine the cause of death of the Reverend Howard and we must all rise to the challenge no matter what. In the interest of justice we can spare no one. Do I make myself clear?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Good. Now, I would like you to relate in your own words, but slowly if you please, and loudly, especially, loudly, what happened when you went to Chalmers Church on Tuesday afternoon. March third.”

The room was completely hushed as Miss Dignam related her story. She was unable to raise her voice, but everybody heard what she said and there were gasps when she described her first sight of the pastor.

“I went into the office. The door was open and the pastor was lying on his back in the middle of the floor. I saw immediately that there was a knife protruding from his neck. He was soaked in blood, which seemed to be everywhere as if the entire room had been doused,” she paused here and dabbed at her mouth. Murdoch realized he was holding his breath like most of the spectators and he was glad Mrs. Howard was not present. Miss Dignam swallowed and continued. “I could see his right eye socket was destroyed ... I first ascertained there was nothing that could help him and then I ran out of the church -”

“Wait a moment, ma’am.” Royce held up his hand. “In what manner did you determine he was beyond help?”

“I put my ear to his chest and I drew off my glove and put my fingers underneath his nose to see if he was still breathing.”

“Did you indeed? That was most collected, if I may say so.”

His comment brought a rush of colour to her pale face but her voice was more spirited. “I did not feel in the least collected, I assure you, sir. But as I told the detective who came to question me”-she nodded over at Murdoch - “if there had been any way to resuscitate Mr. Howard, I would have done it.”

She hadn’t mentioned exactly what she’d done, thought Murdoch, but then he had interviewed her very soon afterwards. Royce held up his hand again to signal she should wait while he wrote down what she had said.

“Continue.”

“As I ran toward Jarvis Street, I was fortunate to encounter a police officer immediately. I told him what I had found. He seemed at a loss as to what to do, but at that moment Mr. Drummond arrived.” She nodded in the direction of a man in the first jurors’ row. “He stayed with me while the constable went into the church. I’m afraid what happened next is hazy in my mind, but eventually the police constable emerged. He sent Mr. Drummond to sound the alarm. Miss Flowers, who had also come for the prayer meeting, arrived and he asked her to escort me to my home, which she did. It is, as I have said, just north of the church.”

Royce looked over at her. “When you first left your house, what time was it?”

“I would say about half past three.”

“Did you see anybody on the street or in the vicinity of the church itself?”

Miss Dignam lowered her head but her voice was clear enough. “It was a cold dismal afternoon so there really

wasn't anyone about. I saw no one."

The coroner leaned toward her. The quieter she became, the louder his voice was. "Please remember you are under oath, ma'am. I must ask you ... do you have any knowledge of who might have murdered Mr. Howard?"

"No, I do not. It is incomprehensible to me. He was a good man. One of Christ's chosen few."

She shuddered and Murdoch thought she might break into tears, but she held on.

"Very well, you may step down, ma'am. Constable, escort the lady to her seat." He consulted the piece of paper on his desk. "Call the next witness, Francis Fyfer, constable second class, number forty-seven."

Fyfer jumped up and strode over to the table where Crabtree administered the oath. The constable's, "I do swear" was loud and Royce beamed his approval. Then Fyfer launched into his tale.

"I was on duty on the afternoon of March third and I was just approaching the end of my beat, which is at Jarvis Street and Carlton, when a woman comes running out from the side path of Chalmers Church. That woman is here in the courtroom, seated in the first row."

Murdoch couldn't help but smile. The young constable must have been a witness before at a formal trial. On the other hand, his demeanour was rather unfortunate, as there was the slightest implication that Miss Dignam was herself on charge. Murdoch knew enough about the collected ignorance of any emotional group of people and he feared what rumours might be getting spawned.

"At first I thought she was hurt because she had blood on her face and hands and garments -"

"One moment, constable." Royce turned over his sheet of paper. "Miss Dignam has told us that she attempted to ascertain whether or not Reverend Howard was quick or dead. Would you say that the amount of blood you observed

on her person was compatible with her pressing her head to the dead man's heart?"

Fyfer paused and flicked nervously at his moustache. "It is possible, sir. She was certainly covered with it."

Royce made a note and Murdoch saw the covert exchange of glances among the spectators, the ripple and shift of reactions. Miss Dignam had her head lowered as if she were praying.

The constable continued his statement in his loud, confident voice. "When I determined that she was uninjured and when I could make out what she was saying, I told her to stay where she was. Mr. Drummond, one of the parishioners who is also present in the courtroom, had arrived at this point and I left the lady in his care while I myself went into the church. I discovered the body of a man lying in one of the rear offices. This man was later identified as Reverend Howard, the pastor of the church. He appeared to have been severely beaten about the head and he was also stabbed in the side of the neck. I could see he was beyond human aid, so I ran back through the church to where I had left the lady in question, now identified as Miss Sarah Dignam. Other people were now standing outside of the church and I ordered one of them, a Miss Flowers, also here present, to take her home, having first obtained her name and address. Then I sent Mr. Drummond to sound the alarm while I did my best to watch the church in case anybody left. Detective Murdoch arrived shortly after, and we went back into the church to get a better look at things. We saw no one other than the dead man."

"Thank you, constable. Please step down and come and read over your statement. If you are satisfied it is as you said, sign your name to the bottom left of the last page."

Royce glanced over at Miss Dignam. "Dear me. In all the excitement, I forgot to ask you to do the same. Please come forward, ma'am."

Miss Dignam stood up, suddenly covered her mouth with her hand, retched, then as quietly and smoothly as a suit of clothes falling from a coat hanger, she sank to the floor.

Chapter Eighteen

MURDOCH AND BOTH of the doctors Ogden sprang forward at the same time. Miss Dignam was crouched on the floor retching bile, which spilled out over her gloved hands onto the floor. Murdoch grabbed his handkerchief from his pocket and handed it to Julia Ogden, who held it in front of Miss Dignam's mouth. The stench of vomit was sharp and sour in the air.

"Court is adjourned for fifteen minutes," called Royce.

"Jurors, you will please move to the other room, immediately. Constable, remove the lady from the courtroom and have somebody clean up that mess." He banged with his gavel and, presumably confident that Miss Dignam was in good hands, he strode out of the room. The two doctors helped Miss Dignam to her feet and, followed by the stares of the spectators, Murdoch led the way to the outer lobby. Here they placed her on a bench. She vomited once more and this time it was the elder Dr. Ogden who volunteered his handkerchief.

"Thank you, I'm so sorry," Miss Dignam whispered.

"Do you still feel faint?" Dr. Julia asked.

"No. I think I will be all right now. I'm so sorry to have acted like that."

"Nonsense. It wasn't your fault," said Dr. Uzziel. "It's damnably upsetting for a woman to have to testify in court, especially with such an insensitive clod running the show."

Murdoch glanced around at the curious onlookers. He recognized one of the funeral parlour attendants, who had come to watch the inquest.

"You, Thompson. Run and fetch us a glass of water."

"Would this help, sir?" The man reached into his inside pocket and took out a small silver flask. "I always keep this handy."

He handed the flask to Dr. Julia, who unscrewed the top and held it out to Miss Dignam.

"Take a sip. That's good. Now another, not too much."

Miss Dignam shuddered and gagged but didn't vomit the brandy back.

"One more."

A little colour began to return to the woman's face, but she still looked wretched. There were deep shadows under her eyes and the lids were reddened from lack of sleep.

"She should go home at once," Julia said to Murdoch. "There is no reason for her to stay, is there?"

"She has to sign a copy of her statement. But I can bring it out here for her."

"Thank you, Mr. Murdoch, I don't think I could bear to ... to go back in there." Miss Dignam stuffed both soiled handkerchiefs into her reticule. "I do apologize to you, gentlemen. I will have these washed and returned to you as soon as possible."

Murdoch could see Constable Crabtree in the door of the chapel, his helmet visible above the crush of people in the lobby. Nobody inside had moved although they were talking in low voices to each other.

"The court will reconvene in five minutes, Mr. Murdoch."

"George, bring Miss Dignam's statement and a pen and inkwell. She's going to sign it here. And ask Miss Flowers if she'd join us. She's the lady in the grey furs."

Dr. Julia offered Miss Dignam more brandy. Seeing Thompson's anxious expression, Murdoch tapped him on the arm.

"Don't worry. Send your bill to the police station. You will be reimbursed."

Crabtree soon returned with an inkwell and paper in his hand and Miss Flowers in tow. She approached her friend

nervously.

"How are you feeling, Sarah?"

"Much better, thank you, May, but I am being sent home."

"Would you mind accompanying her, ma'am?" Murdoch asked Miss Flowers.

It was obvious that May did mind. "But the inquest isn't over yet. And I can't leave Elias in there by himself. You know how he is."

Suddenly, Miss Dignam reached forward and caught her by the sleeve. "Please, May. I must go to the church."

"To Chalmers? What on earth for?"

"I want to pray."

"Good gracious, Sarah, isn't that being rather morbid? After all ..."

She didn't finish her sentence but Miss Dignam shook her head.

"I will be closer to Charles's soul in Chalmers. He loved his church. I know I will be able to feel his presence there."

It was clear what Miss Flowers thought about that.

Murdoch's eyes met those of Dr. Uzziel's, who indicated Miss Dignam should be indulged. He also thought it advisable to keep an eye on her.

"I tell you what, ma'am. Miss Flowers seems to want to stay until the inquest is finished. Why don't I assign Constable Fyfer to go with you to the church? Then he can escort you to your house after that."

"Splendid idea," said Dr. Uzziel.

Miss Dignam gave Murdoch a feeble smile. "Thank you, sir. That would be most kind."

"Now if you are feeling better, I should return to the courtroom," said Dr. Julia. "I think they have returned and I have to give my testimony."

"Thank you, doctor. I am quite all right now."

Uzziel offered his daughter his arm.

"Make way," he called out. "Doctor coming through."

Miss Flowers waved her fingers at her friend but didn't embrace her. "I must join your brother. I'll tell him you are quite recovered. I'll stay and tell you what transpires."

Let's hope the jury doesn't accuse Miss Dignam of murder, thought Murdoch. It was in their jurisdiction to name a culprit if they felt confident of the evidence. He'd seen it happen before.

"Read this through and sign it here, if you will, ma'am," said Crabtree.

Miss Dignam gave the statement a perfunctory glance. "I'm sure it's quite correct," she said and wrote her signature in a shaky hand. They heard the coroner thumping his gavel to signal the court was reconvened and the attention of the onlookers switched abruptly to what they could see in the chapel.

"I must leave you to Constable Fyfer," said Murdoch. "I will call on you soon."

The constable didn't look too happy about leaving the excitement of the inquest, but ever polite, he offered his arm to the lady, who got to her feet and leaning on him heavily made her way to the door, the crowd parting before them like the Red Sea.

Murdoch followed Crabtree back into the chapel.

In case any jurors had tried to evade their civic duty by slipping away during the adjournment, the roll call was taken again and the court settled.

Dr. Ogden was the next witness and she delivered her report in what Murdoch now knew was her customary self-contained manner. One of the jurors was also a physician and when she had finished he asked several highly technical medical questions relating to the manner of the injuries to the skull, but it was obvious to Murdoch the man simply wanted to show off his own knowledge, evidently superior in his own eyes.

"And what is your opinion as to the cause of death, doctor?"

She'd already given her opinion, but she was unflustered, answered him calmly, and repeated her last sentence.

"The pastor bled to death because the weapon pierced the carotid artery."

"I have to ask this question, doctor, even though it might seem superfluous. Could the wound to the neck have been self-inflicted? I have known the most bizarre cases of self-murder."

"No, sir. I do not believe so and the damage to the side of the head was far too severe to have been caused by him falling down. Although the blows to the side of the face were grievous indeed, they would not themselves have caused death. Mr. Howard died from a massive hemorrhage."

Mr. Lyon's hand shot up. "How long before death actually occurred?"

"Given the depth of the wound, I would say it would have happened quite quickly. Perhaps a few minutes at the most."

"Would he have been conscious long enough to confront his murderer?"

"Perhaps."

"Is it possible then that the, um, the one eye was destroyed so that the image of the murderer could not be detected?"

"I cannot speak for the motivation of the murderer, sir, but I assure you we saw no such image in the postmortem examination."

Lyons had a pencil in his hand and he tapped it on his teeth. "Another question, doctor, if I may? In your expert opinion, was the piercing of the artery accidental or deliberate? What I mean is, did the assailant intend to commit murder? Did he know exactly what he was doing, or was he only striking out blindly in the course of which he managed to hit that particular spot?"

"Even if the actual entry point of the knife was accidental, everything seems to indicate that there was a murderous

intent. Mr. Howard was obviously kicked repeatedly when he was lying on the ground. I would say his assailant most certainly wanted to kill him.”

This comment was too much for the spectators and there was an outburst of chatter and more noisy crying from some of the women.

Crabtree called for silence, Royce rapped his gavel, and finally everybody quieted down.

“Are there any more questions for Dr. Ogden?” the coroner asked.

A tiny, rabbit man who had given his name as Moses Galt and his occupation as a buyer in Mr. Simpson’s drapery department raised his hand.

“Given the amount of force necessary to thrust a knife that deeply into a man’s neck, can we assume without question that the murderer could not be of the fair sex?”

This question caused another ripple through the crowd, and Dr. Ogden waited for a moment before answering.

“I would say, we can assume no such thing. Both men and women are capable of unusual strength when the blood is up, whether that is in feats of heroism or acts of blind rage. I have known a woman of quite average build lift a carriage from off the legs of her child who had been run over. It was something she could not possibly have done in normal circumstances.”

More reaction from the crowd and various nodding and exchanges. The jurymen doctor called out that he had known such cases himself.

“In your learned opinion, Dr. Ogden, would the assailant have been marked with blood?” asked the journalist, who obviously was hoping for the most lurid story he could concoct.

“Perhaps less than one might think. The blood probably spurted to the side on one gush. If the murderer was directly behind Mr. Howard, he, or she, would have been able to avoid it. When the pastor fell to the ground, the blood

flowed out but as he died almost immediately, it would not have pulsed and again would have been easy to avoid."

"So the murderer could have been bloodstained or totally untouched, either one?"

"That is correct. It is impossible to say with surety."

There were no more questions, and Royce asked Dr. Ogden to sign her statement. She did so and returned to her seat. Her father tapped her lightly on the elbow to signify his pride in her performance.

Murdoch was called next and he added to the doctor's report by mentioning the missing watch and boots.

"You'd say a thief then, would you, detective?" asked Royce.

"That or somebody wants us to think so."

Mr. Lyons indicated he had a question. "Dr. Ogden in her excellent testimony has told us that there is every indication that the assailant was in a mad fury. I wonder then, if a person in such a state would have the presence of mind to deliberately mislead the police. I beg your pardon, Mr. Murdoch, I have no wish to cast aspersions on your competence."

In fact Murdoch thought the man's question was a shrewd one and he'd thought of it himself.

"Frankly, sir, I don't know at this point. It would have taken seconds to snatch the watch and only a minute or two at the most to pull off the boots. I could see even a person in a state of blind rage, having both time and sense to do those things with the intention of throwing suspicion elsewhere."

"Or there could have been more than one assailant," piped up the buyer.

"That is not out of the question."

There were a couple more questions about his opinion on the injuries from the doctor who was still trying to discredit Dr. Ogden, but Murdoch deferred to her judgment and the

juror was forced to sit back and resume twiddling with his gold watch chain.

Murdoch signed his statement and returned to his seat. The next witness was a Mrs. Emmeline Bright, who was the matron of the girls' home on Gerrard Street. Fyfer had taken her original statement and Murdoch knew he would be disappointed not to hear her testimony, which he considered of vital importance. Murdoch was less sanguine about the reliability of eyewitnesses.

Chapter Nineteen

MRS. BRIGHT WAS SURPRISINGLY YOUNG for her position, and belied her name by her sombre, authoritative manner, which a dowager might have envied. Murdoch imagined she would be most intimidating to her young charges.

Crabtree swore her in and she gave her testimony. "I was walking along Gerrard Street going toward Jarvis. The time was exactly a quarter past one o'clock. I was on my way to visit my sister-in-law, who resides on Church Street and who has recently been delivered of her first child. I noticed a man was crossing the Gardens in the direction of Chalmers Church. He was wearing a long dark coat and a dark fedora hat. He was carrying some sort of sack over his back. He looked like a tramp."

The officious doctor raised his hand and, getting the nod from Royce, he asked, "Was this person running or walking?"

"He was hurrying."

Royce frowned. "May I remind the good men of the jury that Tuesday was a miserably cold day and any sensible person would be in a hurry to get indoors. We cannot make more of this witness's testimony than is called for."

Moses Galt indicated he had a question.

"How can you be so certain about the time of day, Mrs. Bright?"

The matron smiled. She'd been hoping somebody would ask this. "I was due to meet my sister-in-law at one-thirty and I was delayed because I had to admit a new girl. I looked at the clock as I was leaving. It was ten past one. The home is only a few minutes walk from Jarvis Street."

Lyons put up his hand. "You seem quite certain the man you saw was a tramp. Other than the fact that he was carrying a sack, what else was there to identify him as such?"

Mrs. Bright fidgeted with her glove, the first sign of uncertainty she had yet shown.

"The park is a favourite spot for tramps, who often go to the churches in the area to beg for money. They are quite a plague, I might add. This man had a thick black beard and he walked the way tramps do. His clothes were not good quality."

"Did you see him enter the church?"

"Yes," she hesitated. "Er, that is I didn't see him open the door, if that's what you mean, but where else would he be going?"

Lyons would have made a good lawyer, Murdoch thought, he didn't give the woman a chance to compose herself. "You said he walked the way tramps do. How is that, may I ask, ma'am?"

"Well, they sort of shuffle."

"You said he was hurrying."

"He was, but he still dragged his feet." She frowned at Lyons, obviously not used to being questioned in this way. Murdoch wondered briefly what sort of man she had married. She would have to be a widow to be employed at the home, but she wasn't in mourning dress so the bereavement must have happened a few years ago. She had a full, smooth face with well-shaped brows, but the hardness of her expression was not attractive. He tried to be more charitable. Perhaps she was covering profound loneliness.

There appeared to be no more questions from the jury and Royce took his large gold watch from his waistcoat pocket and consulted it.

"It's almost dinnertime and I should begin my summing up so we can –"

The Reverend Swanzey was sitting in the row behind the jurors and suddenly he jumped to his feet. "I do apologize for the late notice, Mr. Royce, but I would like to be sworn in. I believe I have some evidence to add that could be of the utmost importance."

He had a fleck of saliva at the corner of his mouth and he actually swayed a little so that Murdoch was afraid he might collapse. He could feel Dr. Ogden shift beside him, so she too was at the ready.

"Good gracious, sir. Why didn't you tell the constable earlier so he could put you on my list?"

Swanzey gulped and Murdoch saw his prominent Adam's apple move up and down.

"I beg your pardon. I realize that was remiss of me, but frankly, the frightful events drove it completely from my mind. However, after hearing Mrs. Bright's testimony, I think perhaps it might be significant."

"Very well. Swear him in, constable, if you please."

Swanzey went through the ritual, seeming nervous and on edge. He sat down in the witness chair.

"Give your statement, Mr. Swanzey, and do speak up," Royce said. "The previous witness set an excellent example."

"Yes, sir." Swanzey took a deep breath and when he spoke his voice was loud and resonant. There would be no difficulty hearing him at the back of the room. "It is my habit to take an afternoon constitutional as often as the demands of my work permit. I find it is an opportunity for inner contemplation and even in the most inclement weather I do so. However, on Tuesday, I decided that the raw afternoon was too much even for me and after a short walk around the Gardens I went into the greenhouse. The greenery is so soothing to the eye at this time of year." He paused and looked about the room. Murdoch could feel how intently the spectators were listening to him. Swanzey was demonstrating the skill and pacing of a good preacher.

“It was as I was making a turn of the building when I encountered a tramp. I did not think much of it because it is not unusual for wanderers to go inside the greenhouses where they have some protection from the elements. However, this man, I now see exactly fitted the description of the man seen by our estimable matron hurrying toward the church.” There was a murmuring from the spectators. “He was of middle age, tall, and broad-shouldered with long, grizzled hair and beard. His coat, albeit ragged, was dark, and he was wearing a soft-brimmed black hat. He also had a sack of some sort, although when I met up with him, he was not carrying it but rather had set it at his feet.” He paused again.

“Did you speak to the man?” Royce asked.

“I merely bid him good afternoon. He was a rather sullen fellow and didn’t give me much of an answer. As I said, I would have thought no more about him except that I now realize he had a watch in his hand, which he had been in the process of winding when I came across him.”

“Was it a silver watch?” one of the jurors called out.

“I wouldn’t swear to that, but I did remark to myself that such a fellow had a watch at all.”

“Did you notice if there was blood on him?” Lyons asked.

“No, I did not. It was quite gloomy inside and he wore dark clothes.”

Royce leaned toward the pastor. “Mr. Swanzey, I want you to consider your answer to my next question very carefully. If you do not know, say so. I don’t want any exaggeration or twisting of the facts because you think it will suit us ... Now then. What time of day was it when you encountered this tramp?”

Swanzey’s Adam’s apple bobbed vigorously. “I left my lodgings on Gerrard Street shortly after three, as is my wont to do. I walked around the park as I said, then I went into the greenhouse where I walked some more. I met the man on my third perambulation, so he must have entered after I

did." He hesitated, biting on his lower lip. "I would estimate the time was approximately a quarter to four o'clock or shortly thereafter. I decided to resume my walk and I bid the fellow good day and left. As far as I know, he remained in the greenhouse. I myself proceeded across the park toward Sherbourne Street. It was later that I returned to the church and saw a crowd of people had gathered. Then, alas, I was told the sad news."

He swallowed hard and Murdoch thought for a moment he was going to burst into tears, but he clamped his teeth and remained in control.

Royce looked over at Murdoch. "Detective, you have heard Mrs. Bright's and Reverend Swanzey's testimony. It is not a leap of credibility to assume the two men are one and the same. The man could easily have escaped to the greenhouse from the church after the attack on the pastor. I assume you will be doing everything in your power to find the wretch."

"Yes, sir, of course."

As far as Murdoch was concerned the evidence was not conclusive, but there was no point in going into that now. Certainly, the tramp needed to be found.

There were no more witnesses or questions and Royce's summation was short. He then withdrew to the rear room and Crabtree directed the jurors to the adjoining room for their deliberations. One of two people in the audience stood up and stretched, but mostly they just sat quietly, the weeping women were comforted but all the voices were low and respectful.

It was hardly more than fifteen minutes later when the jurors returned and filed back to their seats. Royce took his seat and Crabtree took a roll call again.

"Mr. Chamberlin, have you and the jury agreed on your verdict?"

"We have, sir."

“As foreman, will you please address this court and state what conclusion the jury has reached.”

The elderly man stood up, adjusted his pince-nez, and, holding his notes in front of him, said, “We the jury here gathered today declare that on the third day of March, 1896 , between the hours of three and half past three o’clock, in the offices of Chalmers Presbyterian Church, a person or persons to the jurors aforesaid unknown, did feloniously murder the Reverend Charles Edmund Howard.”

This verdict was not a surprise to anybody and there was no reaction from the spectators.

“All of you must come forward and sign beside your seal that you agree with this verdict,” said Royce.

When that was done and they all sat down again, Royce addressed them once more.

“Gentlemen, hearken to your verdict as delivered by you. You find that Charles Edmund Howard was murdered by person or persons unknown, so say you all. The body can now be buried.”

It was Crabtree’s turn. “Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! You good men of Toronto who have been empanelled and sworn of the jury to inquire for our Sovereign Lady, the Queen, touching the death of Charles Edmund Howard and who have returned your verdict, may now depart hence and take your ease. God save the Queen.”

Royce gathered his papers together. “Thank you, gentlemen. You are invited to join me in a small repast at the Crown’s expense.” He banged the gavel. “I hereby declare this court adjourned.”

The reporters made as fast an exit as they could. Murdoch stood up, ready to let the crowd leave ahead of him. Two rows back, a skinny arm emerged from a heavy raccoon coat and waved at him. As the wearer of the coat was also wearing a matching fur cap, Murdoch hadn’t recognized him. Then he saw it was Mr. Hicks. Next to him was a

woman who was so muffled in a woollen shawl, he hadn't recognized her either. It was Josie Tugwell. He nodded at her, but she didn't acknowledge him.

Chapter Twenty

TELLING CRABTREE TO FOLLOW on as soon as he could, Murdoch went straight back to the police station. He parked his wheel outside and walked into the front hall. Sergeant Gardiner was sitting at his high stool behind the desk.

"Don't bother taking off your coat. Miss Dignam rang through. She wants to talk to you as soon as possible. In person, not on the telephone."

Two young women whose provocative dress proclaimed a dubious occupation were sitting together on the public bench that ran around the room. They made ostentatious giggling noises.

"Cut that out, you two," bellowed the sergeant and they stopped abruptly. They couldn't afford to alienate him.

Murdoch approached Gardiner. "Did she say anything else?"

"No, just that it was urgent. It was about half an hour ago."

"Has Fyfer reported in?"

"Not yet. What was the verdict?"

"What you'd expect, homicide by person or persons unknown."

"Well, I'm warning you. Don't leave me alone with the culprit when you do find him." The sergeant's normally affable face was contorted with anger. "How dare that scum take down a man of the church."

Murdoch started to leave, then he paused. "By the way, what is your opinion of Miss Dignam?"

"She's a very well-bred lady. She's always had a greeting for me and my wife, whereas there are some whose faces

would crack if they smiled a good morning to the likes of us."

"Do you think she is prone to hysteria?"

"Not that I know of. But I've only seen her on Sundays, mind you. She's never married and has no chance of a dowry as I've heard tell, so I'd say she's probably lonely, but sensible with it."

"And Angus Drummond? What's your view of him?"

"Salt of the earth." The sergeant gave a wry grin. "A bit too salty for some tastes, but then you can't please everybody, can you?"

"Mrs. Howard refused to admit him when he came to offer his condolences."

Gardiner sighed. "I can understand that. Angus hasn't minced words when he's had something to say about the pastor. But that's just his way. He's a good man who's devoted to the church."

"Thanks, sergeant. I'd better get going."

Murdoch headed for the door. The two women watched him go and the older one in the scarlet hat managed to whisper, "'ave a nice time."

In the fading daylight, Murdoch could see that the Dignam house, while large and elegant, was not in a good state of repair, something he hadn't noticed previously. The paint on the door and windows was peeling and the garden was overgrown and neglected.

Unexpectedly, it was Miss Dignam herself who answered his ring.

"Thank you for responding so quickly, Mr. Murdoch. Please come in."

He stepped inside and she waited while he took off his hat and coat. She accepted them from him as if she were a maid and put them on the hall stand.

"This way, if you please."

She led the way, holding aloft a single candle. Her black gown seemed to him to be excessively tight at the waist and the skirt was pulled back into a no longer fashionable bustle. There was a definite whiff of camphor coming from her. She had taken out a dress from a previous mourning period and she even had a weeping veil pinned to her hair. She opened the door to the drawing room and they went in.

"I must thank you again for your kindness at my, er, my indisposition." She gave him a faint smile. "You remind me of Charles. Even though you are a police detective, I observe that you have the same air about you. 'His eyes were the eyes of doves.'"

Murdoch knew by now what she was referring to and he acknowledged the compliment with a slight nod of his head. He had been compared to various things before but never to Solomon.

"I know the verdict of the inquest," she continued. "Miss Flowers and my brother together with our servant are presently in the kitchen discussing every word that was said. However, they might be done momentarily. Elias has a limited tolerance for company, even in these exciting times."

Murdoch could see a tea tray with silver teapot and china cups was set up by the fire, but he took her last words as a cue and forestalled her invitation to take tea.

"I gather it was a matter of some urgency on which you wished to speak to me, Miss Dignam."

She sat down in the fireside chair, which was pulled as close to the hearth as possible, and again he took the one opposite her.

"I was wondering if you found my cake tin?"

If it weren't for her complete composure, he would have considered she had dropped into some kind of dementia.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am?"

"I had made a special cake for the prayer meeting that I was carrying when I went into the church. I don't have it

here so I can only assume I dropped it ... when I ... when I tried to ascertain whether Mr. Howard was alive."

"To my knowledge no cake tin has been found, Miss Dignam."

"Then that is not without significance, wouldn't you say?"

Caught up in the world of spinster ladies and tea and cake, Murdoch looked at her blankly for a moment.

She sighed. "I see I am not making myself clear. Forgive me. The tin is a pretty one with some sentimental value, but that is not the point. If you have not found it, then it was stolen." She looked away from him into the dancing flames. "I told you that when I found him, the pastor's body was still warm to the touch. It is possible that his assailant had remained in the church, perhaps hiding. When I ran out I must have left the tin behind. It is likely that the murderer took it."

She had a point, but a cake tin!

"You say the tin had no particular monetary value, ma'am."

"That is correct but the murderer did not necessarily know that, did he? It could have contained something of value. He probably took it with him to find out."

"How big was it?"

"It was large enough to hold a cake that would feed eight people. The colours were gold and pink with a motif of peacocks and roses."

Not an object that could be easily overlooked.

"I'll check with the constables who were searching the premises, ma'am."

She leaned toward him. "There is one more thing, Mr. Murdoch. I didn't mention this to you before because frankly in the upset of the moment, it slipped my mind. I also didn't think to say it at the inquest. There was a most disagreeable odour in the church when I first went in. I have been thinking about this most carefully, how I would describe it to you. Rotten eggs combined with a stale dirty sort of smell as

if dishcloths had been allowed to stand damp for a long period of time.” There was a muffled sound of laughter from the next room and she frowned. “Elias told me that one of the witnesses saw a tramp going into the church –”

Murdoch interrupted her. “He was observed crossing the Gardens, ma’am, not actually seen entering the church.”

“But he must have gone inside. Tramps do have the odour I mentioned. I have smelled it before. They often come to Chalmers to beg. The fact that my cake tin is missing would confirm that. He would have expected it to contain food.”

She was making sense, but Murdoch found himself reluctant to pounce on the “tramp” theory. On the other hand, he couldn’t deny that was what it was starting to look like, especially given Reverend Swanzey’s testimony. If the man he had encountered and the tramp noticed by Mrs. Bright were one and the same, the likelihood was such a fellow could have entered the church, killed Howard, and escaped to a temporary hideout in the greenhouse. The timing fitted.

“Is that all you wanted to tell me, Miss Dignam?”

“Yes it is. I’m so sorry I didn’t say this earlier, but it had left my mind completely until now. It was only when I walked into the church again that I remembered.”

Murdoch wondered if she had communicated with the dead man’s spirit as she had hoped.

“There is something I meant to ask you, Miss Dignam. I do understand that you were in a state of shock when you came upon Reverend Howard’s body, but perhaps more things are coming back to you now.”

She stiffened. “I don’t know what you mean, Mr. Murdoch.”

“Constable Fyfer says you were covered with blood when you came running toward him, particularly your hands ... why was that, Miss Dignam?”

Her hand flew to her cheek. “You heard what I said at the inquest. I bent down to his chest to check for a heartbeat.

There was considerable blood on his coat. It must have ..."
She didn't finish.

"Ma'am, essentially you are still under oath to tell the truth."

"Of course. I don't know why you are speaking to me this way, detective."

Watching her try to puff herself up was like seeing a kitten fluff itself in front of the dog.

"Miss Dignam. Did you attempt to remove the knife from Mr. Howard's neck?"

She turned quite white. "I ... er ..."

"I must have the truth, ma'am."

She stared at him for a moment with horrified eyes, then she shrank back into her chair. "I did try, yes, but it was immovable."

"You should have told me that before."

"Forgive me. It was cowardice on my part. I was afraid how it might seem to the world, to my brother, for instance. Elias is already disgruntled with me for my behaviour at the inquest. And it is one thing to chance across such an unsavoury event, to use his words, it is another to be actively implicated. I shudder to think what he would say if he knew to what lengths I went in my desire to resuscitate Charles."

"Is there anything else you have not said, Miss Dignam?"

She looked away from him. "Nothing. I have told you everything."

They heard the sound of voices from the hall.

Miss Flowers, laughing merrily, and a deeper voice, who Murdoch assumed was Miss Dignam's brother.

"Ah, she has finished."

Miss Dignam got to her feet.

"I would rather they didn't know you are here, Mr. Murdoch. They think talking to you will further upset me. I will draw them both away to the kitchen. Please wait here."

She put her finger to her lips and hurried out, closing the door behind her. He could hear her talking and Miss Flowers answering but could not make out what they were saying. Then she came back into the room. "I've sent her off to make some tea. My brother has returned to his room. We have a few minutes only. I will give you the cake tin."

Murdoch was beginning to suspect that the poor woman really had become unhinged through shock but she went on, keeping her voice low. "I thought it might be helpful for your investigation to see the twin of the one that is missing. My dear mother purchased several at once some years ago. Every Boxing Day, she liked to dispense Christmas cakes, mostly to my father's employees but also to the families she knew who were impoverished."

She listened for a moment to see if her friend was returning but all was quiet. She quickly went over to the tea trolley, pulled up the white damask cloth, and took a colourful cake tin from the rack.

"Here, you can take it with you for comparison. There is cake in it. I had made a second one and there is no sense in it going to waste. Elias doesn't like caraway seed. I hope you do."

"Er, yes, thank you."

"Please eat it then."

She thrust the tin, indeed pink and gold with a peacocks-and-roses motif, into his hands. Then she went to the hall stand for his hat and coat.

"I'll keep May in the kitchen and you can slip away and let yourself out. We are on the telephone and you can ring me as soon as you have any more information. Goodbye, Mr. Murdoch."

She went to the door, opened it a crack, and peeked out. She turned to him and nodded. "It's all clear."

Holding his hat and coat, the tin under his arm, Murdoch slipped away.

Chapter Twenty-One

A LIGHT SNOW WAS FALLING as Murdoch left the Dignam house, which made bicycling unpleasant. He turned left from Jarvis on to Carlton Street and rode up to Drummond's grocery store. At first he thought the grocer had not yet returned from the inquest, but there was a dim light burning and, drawing close, he could see the grocer standing behind the counter, reading a newspaper. There were no customers. Murdoch propped his bicycle against the curb and went into the store.

Drummond looked up, his expression was sour. "Is this official business, detective, or are you in search of fresh vegetables? I'll tell you right now, the potatoes aren't very good and the carrots are woody. The cabbage is all right though, as long as you're not sick of cabbage by now."

Murdoch thought that if this was the way Drummond welcomed all his customers, it was no wonder his store was empty. Honesty might be a sign of virtue, but it could put a damper on business.

"I'm here officially, but I will take a pound of oatmeal while I'm at it. We're running low."

Drummond came from behind the counter to serve him from one of the bins. He didn't seem to have much stock and the potatoes and carrots did indeed look wizened and the few Brussels sprouts were yellowing. Murdoch glanced over his shoulder. There was a big tree a few paces to the west of the store, but it was bare of foliage. He could see the side door of Chalmers Church quite clearly.

"Here you are. Two cents." The grocer thrust a crumpled brown paper bag at him.

Murdoch handed him the money and Drummond held it in the palm of his hand and squinted through his glasses.

"That won't bury me, will it? Are you sure there's nothing else I can get you?"

"No thank you." Murdoch accepted the brown paper bag, then he pulled the cake tin from the front of his coat where he'd wedged it.

"Have you seen this before?"

Drummond looked surprised. "Of course I have. It belongs to Miss Dignam. She uses it all the time at church bake sales. Why have you got it?"

"Actually she tells me this is one of several that she possesses. She says that she took some cake to the church on Tuesday and in her shock she left the tin there. It has not been found. She has lent me this so if I do come across a cake tin I can compare the two of them."

"That's proof then, isn't it?"

"Of what, Mr. Drummond?"

"Come on, detective. You know what I mean, don't play the dummy with me. That verdict of person unknown we brought in was a pile of horse manure. A waste of time, mine and the taxpayer's. We all know who the culprit is. And this business with the tin proves it. The tramp must have picked it up. He's the one you should be after." He glared at Murdoch in exasperation. "You kenna have forgot already what the matron said?"

"You mean that she noticed a man crossing the Gardens who in her opinion was a tramp?"

"'In her opinion'? My that's a wee too lawyerish for me. That lassie is as sharp as a thumbtack. She saw a tramp all right and you don't have to be a clever detective to work it out. He went into the church. Had some sort of quarrel with Charles Howard, for God knows what reason, killed him, then hoofed it over to that greenhouse where Mr. Swanzey ran into him. With a silver watch I might add, that just by coincidence was missing from the pastor's waistcoat."

He was right, but there was something smugly know-it-all about Drummond that Murdoch found intensely irritating.

"You saw him, did you, Mr. Drummond?"

"What do you mean, 'saw him'?"

The grocer's cheeks, what was visible of them, were already rosy in colour, so Murdoch couldn't tell if the man had blushed. Nevertheless, the question seemed to disconcert him.

"You have a good view of the church and the park from your shop. I noticed you seem to spend a lot of time gazing out of the window. I was asking a simple question. Did you see this tramp either enter or leave the church?"

"No, I did not. I would have said so if I had." He dragged up a semblance of a smile. "Don't mind me, Mr. Murdoch. I can be a rough old fox, but I'm harmless. You appear to be taking offence at my tone and I didna mean anything by it. The whole affair has got us all riled up and short-tempered. Miss Sarah Dignam is a good-hearted soul and she doesna deserve to be drawn into the whole bloody godforsaken mess. I blew off a slate when you showed me that cake tin and what it implied. No hard feelings, I hope." He stuck out his hand and Murdoch was forced to shake it. He wasn't sure why the grocer was doing such an aboutface and trying to placate him. Drummond went over to one of the bins and picked up an apple.

"Here, peace offering. I know it's as wrinkled as an old man's behind but it's still sweet."

"Thank you." Murdoch put the wizened apple in his pocket. "You said a few minutes ago, 'for God knows what reason,' when you referred to the possibility that a tramp may have murdered Reverend Howard."

"Ay. I canna imagine Charles Howard refusing to help any tramp if they came a asking. He was as soft as butter." His tone was neither contemptuous nor admiring. "Strictly speaking, it wasna his own money he was giving out, it was the kirk's. I believe if you're trusted with that responsibility

you have to be doubly careful. You can waste your own muck, but not the public's."

Something struck Murdoch and he said, "Mr. Howard was a Visitor for the House of Industry, is that work you've done yourself?"

"Ay. I volunteer when I can. They need somebody like me." Murdoch pitied the applicants who would be on Drummond's list.

"By the way, Mr. Drummond, I understand there was some enmity between you and Mr. Howard."

"Who the devil told you that?" He stepped away and folded his arms across his chest. His eyes were partially obscured by the spectacles, but Murdoch could sense that he had once again hit on a nerve.

"Never mind who told me, is it true?"

"No. Not the least. We didna see eye to eye about some matters of doctrine, but it wasn't personal and I'd no call it enmity."

"You're an elder at the church, are you not? I understand Reverend Howard had to be elected to his office by the church council. Did you vote for him?"

"That's a private matter within the church."

Murdoch leaned forward. "I'm investigating the brutal murder of a man in the prime of his life, Mr. Drummond. At the moment, there are no such things as private matters. Please answer my question."

"I dinna like the way the wind is blowing. I had nothing to do with Howard's death, as you seem to be insinuating."

Murdoch threw his hands out in mock indignation. "Good heavens, sir. All I asked was if the pastor was your choice."

"No, he was not. And there you have it. The blunt unvarnished truth. He was too -" Drummond waved his hands. "Too florid. Chalmers is an old and dignified church. We came here and broke off from the previous congregation just so we could maintain our traditions, not melt and merge into Baptists or Methodists. Ach, Howard was well educated

enough and I dare say the ladies found him charming, but I have no desire to belong to a mongrel church, thank you very much." He touched his finger to the side of his nose. "Between you and me, I wouldn't be surprised if he didn't have a sly fondness for popish practices."

"God forbid," said Murdoch.

"It's true. He wanted us to start a subscription for stained-glass windows. He was devilishly keen on music, and some of his interpretations of the scriptures were bordering on blasphemous in my opinion."

Murdoch was curious to know what those interpretations were, but he didn't want to get off track.

"Who was your choice, if I may ask?"

"Matthew Swanzey. He might look like a dry stick, but he's got God's fire in his belly. You should hear the man preach."

"He was in the running then?"

"That's right. And he should have got it. He's been with Chalmers for the past six years as an associate pastor. We all expected he would be called when Pastor Cameron died. I didna understand it. The Kirk session was beguiled by a smooth tongue, if you ask me. And Howard won the vote. Why bring in a newcomer at all, I'd like to know? Besides which the man was originally a Yankee."

"Mr. Howard knew of your views, I presume?"

Drummond patted his skinny stomach, as if he'd had a good meal. "I'm not one to hide my opinions in namby-pamby language. Ask anybody as knows me and they'll tell you Angus Drummond is a man who calls a spade a spade even if others want to name it a golden shovel."

Murdoch was saved from the impulse to be rude by the tinkle of the bell as a customer entered the store. Drummond turned to greet her.

"Ah Mrs. Reid, come for your dinner, have you? Well you'd better take one of the tins of salmon I got in. Unless you've got some butter, which you probably don't, the potatoes aren't worth the water."

Murdoch headed for the door and called out, "If you do come across the cake tin, please let me know right away."

Drummond barely deigned a nod and Murdoch left him to browbeat his intimidated customer.

Chapter Twenty-Two

THE LAST TIME Murdoch had been in the horticultural gardens pavilion was with Liza. They had gone to hear the Grenadiers band and he remembered it as being unbearably hot inside the pavilion, because even with all the windows opened wide to get a cross breeze, the sun had beaten down all day on the glass. Ladies fanned themselves desperately but sweated nonetheless. In spite of the heat, a small area had been cleared for dancing and several couples were jumping around with more vigour than grace, to the military two step. Murdoch didn't know how to dance then and no amount of cajoling on Liza's part could get him onto the dance floor. He wasn't about to make such a fool of himself. Since she died, he'd taken dance lessons and had to admit he had enjoyed himself. *If onlys* were useless, but they slipped into his thoughts more often than he liked.

A long greenhouse abutted the pavilion porch and its entrance was from the porch. Murdoch pushed open the double doors and felt as if he had stepped into summer. The air was warm and moist and heavy with the smell of vegetation. He was in the main pergola and even though outside was grey and sunless, here the lush green plants and banks of multicoloured flowers made the day seem much brighter. The horticultural gardens and the greenhouses were the pride of the city and were as well tended as any private garden.

Just inside the entrance a young couple was sitting close together on a bench. They quickly moved apart as he came in and the woman straightened her hat. She was fair-skinned and her blush was obvious. Her sweetheart also

looked discomfited. Murdoch realized he must have frowned at them, but it was not from disapproval, it was envy. He made himself smile, touched his hat, and walked around to the other side of central island where the trees and shrubs hid him from view. A squirrel had got trapped inside the pergola and it was chittering in fear and indignation, otherwise the greenhouse was quiet, any noise of drays or carriages shut out by the glass.

Murdoch looked around him. There were more benches on this side and behind them was a wide flowerbed. Each variety of shrub and flower was labelled. Many of them were unfamiliar to him, but he didn't have time or inclination for horticultural lessons. In the middle of the island was a fanciful structure set up as part of a living room. A fireplace was made of ivy that had been trained to grow around a wooden frame. Above it were blue and yellow patches of some other climbing plant masquerading as the kind of marble you might find in a nobby house. There were real pieces of coal in the grate and red and orange flowers growing among them to simulate fire. A birdcage of twigs swung from a branch of a nearby tree. There was a fake bird in the cage made also of intertwined twigs, but the bars were wide enough to allow real birds to enter and a sparrow was hopping in and out of the cage. Murdoch was about to walk on when the bird fluttered down and lighted on the arm of the bench close to him. It took a couple of quick pecks at something between the slats, then hopped to the path and pecked some more. Murdoch dropped into a crouch, scaring the bird into flight. It was a big assumption, of course – who knows how many people had come through this pergola? – but he wanted to see what the bird was eating. There was a light scattering of crumbs on the bench and the path and he could see they were cake, not bread or biscuit. He took a blank envelope from his pocket and scooped up as many of the crumbs as he could. Later, using a magnifying glass he might be able to determine what kind of cake it was.

At that moment, he heard the ring of hobnailed boots and Constable George Crabtree appeared.

"Good afternoon, sir."

"How'd you track me down, George?"

"Sergeant said as how you'd been called up to Miss Dignam's and I was heading up there when I seen you going into the greenhouse. I thought I might be some help."

"Good man. Among other things, I'm trying to see if I can find a cake tin here somewhere."

He quickly filled in the constable on his interview with Miss Dignam and her story of the missing tin and the bad odour in the church.

"It looks like we're after a tramp then, doesn't it, sir? When she ran off, he went back to his prey, took the boots and watch, saw the cake tin and picked that up as well. He'd hightail it over here till the coast was clear, I'll wager."

"It's looking that way. But what we need is some hard evidence. So let's start where Reverend Swanzey says he met up with the wayfarer. He was in the adjoining greenhouse."

Murdoch led the way through the connecting doors. This building was warmer and even more lush than the pergola.

"The wife and kiddies love coming here in the winter," said Crabtree. "She says it shortens the season. She even talked me into coming to a concert in the pavilion last summer. Very good it was. Some cove was a whistler, you know, he sort of cupped his hands and blew through them. Sounded exactly like a flute."

"Ah yes. I've heard that. I know somebody who does it."

"Did you ever go yourself?"

"Not to that one ... anyway, George, I know the constables searched this entire place, but we've got to go over it with a toothcomb."

"Do you really think a tramp would throw away a cake tin, sir? The ones I've known wouldn't. They always prize

something where they can keep their baccy or any extra food.”

“You’re probably right, George. I’m thinking we’re more likely looking for old boots,” said Murdoch. “If he stole good boots from the pastor, he’d want to wear them right away. In which case he would have to get rid of his own. Why don’t you start on the other side and we’ll meet at the far end.”

Like the pergola, the greenhouse had a central island of tall shrubs and flowering plants that the path encircled. Crabtree turned to the right and Murdoch began to walk slowly down the path to the left. He was using his eyes, but he was also trying to put himself into the skin of the unknown tramp. In spite of what Dr. Ogden had said, Murdoch thought it was likely the murderer would have some traces of blood on his trousers and shoes. In which case he would want to get rid of them. A few feet down from the entrance was a rock garden, and water cascaded from a discreetly hidden pipe near the ceiling, over a manufactured rocky incline, and into a pool below. He could see fat goldfish swimming lazily among the lily pads.

There was a low railing around the pool, presumably for the safety of the public and no doubt the goldfish. There were masses of small cresses growing around the rocks, and he thought some of them near the lip looked crushed. If you wanted to clean off your boots and trousers, this was the easiest place to reach the water. He wished he’d brought his magnifying glass. He examined the spot as closely as he could but couldn’t really see an imprint of a boot or shoe. A slate slab overhang was chipped at the end, but that could have happened a long time ago. Not yet what could be considered hard evidence. He straightened up and continued to move slowly along the path.

He had only gone a little way when he was struck by a sweet scent drifting on the air. He halted. Surely not! But there they were, a mass of purple hyacinths in the

flowerbed. He always thought of them as Liza's flowers now. "Oh my dear," he said softly.

"Mr. Murdoch, sir. Over here."

Crabtree was calling to him, his voice excited. Murdoch ran around to the other side, where he saw his constable kneeling by the edge of the path. Here there was another small pond and on its far bank were a shed and a small water wheel that was revolving slowly. Crabtree, his sleeve rolled up, had his arm thrust deep into the water.

"I think I've got something, sir."

He bent even closer to the water and with a tug, like little Tom Horner, he pulled out the plum. One black boot, soles split, dirty. He repeated the action and fished out a second boot.

He beamed at Murdoch. "That wheel was making a funny noise. It was hitting something as it went around. I thought it was a good idea to see what was the trouble."

"Well done, George. Well done. Is there anything else in there?"

Crabtree fished around. "I don't think so."

Murdoch knotted the shoelaces together so he could carry the boots. "Let's continue the search, but I think we've got as much as we're going to get."

They stayed in the greenhouse for another half an hour but found nothing more that could be remotely seen as significant. There was no sign of a cake tin, with or without peacocks.

Chapter Twenty-Three

LOUISA HOWARD AND REVEREND SWANZEY had been sitting in silence for several minutes. Louisa was sewing her initials in black thread on new black-bordered handkerchiefs. She was glad of the lack of conversation, happy not to have to respond to the endless comments, mostly from the ladies, who had been calling on her. *Such a good man, so kind and generous*. They all said variations of the same theme. It wasn't that she didn't believe Charles to have been a good man, she did, but first of all, each remark made her weep afresh and second an insidious snake of resentment was stirring underneath her grief and shock. It was she who was left to raise their children, she who had to deliver his fatherless baby. She would have to move from this house now, and she had enjoyed her brief reign as pastor's wife with the prestige it accorded her. Oh there'd be pity and apologies from the committee of elders, but another pastor had to be found. Where would she go now? She had sent a telegram to her parents who lived in Buffalo and she knew they were coming to visit her. But in the meantime, there was so much to see to. Both children were coming down with colds, which didn't help matters. Charles had been an affectionate father, spending time with his children as often as he could and she could see how much they missed him. Louisa shifted her position as best she could. Her pregnancy wasn't yet that advanced, but she was uncomfortable in the mourning dress Miss Smith had sat up through the night making for her. The crepe at the throat was stiff and scratchy and even with her corset, which she wasn't ready to abandon, the waist was too tight.

"Is there anything I can get for you, Mrs. Howard?" Swanzey asked. She shook her head and he returned to his ruminations. He was probably thinking about when he'll be offered the position of pastor, she thought with a puff of spite. There was little doubt he would get it. When Reverend Cameron had died, Swanzey and Charles had both been candidates for the position. The decision process had taken many months and even though there were countless prayers for God's guidance, when the final vote was taken and Charles Howard, an American, was called from Buffalo, a few of the ladies of the congregation had let slip to Louisa that the final appointment had caused much acrimony. Well they'll be happy now, she thought. Swanzey would take over. The elders were unlikely to go to the bother of finding somebody else. Swanzey wasn't married, so perhaps he wouldn't want to live in this house. It would be large for a bachelor. But then if he was offered the position, he would soon be looking around for a wife, she was sure of that. She glanced at him covertly. He was sitting across from her, staring into the fire. He was more handsome in profile, she thought, with his strong nose and lean jaw. Face to face, his eyes were unattractive and his lips ill defined. He suffered from a chronic eye irritation and his lids were reddened, the eyelashes often crusty. The lips he attempted to hide with a full moustache. His conversation was virtually non-existent as far as she was concerned, and she never felt comfortable in his presence, suspecting he found her wanting in seriousness. Nevertheless, if he became the pastor of Chalmers, which was supported by a large and wealthy congregation, she was sure he would find some young woman willing to marry him.

The clock on the mantelpiece chimed the quarter hour. He'd been here at least twenty minutes.

"I'm sure you have a lot of matters to attend to, Mr. Swanzey. I shall be quite all right by myself for a little while."

He started and turned toward her. "Nothing is as pressing as your well-being, Mrs. Howard. I wonder ... would you like me to say a prayer?"

"Thank you, that would be a great comfort." Louisa put aside her sewing. One of Reverend Swanzey's greatest attributes was a facility with extemporaneous prayers.

He perched on the edge of the couch and covered her hands with his.

"Let us pray."

Louisa closed her eyes, but she was conscious of the dryness of his hands and the heat they generated.

"The Lord said to Cain, 'What has thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand ...'"

Louisa felt a fine spray of spittle on her cheek, but she couldn't remove her hand from his to wipe it off. He was gripping her tightly. His voice had become louder and more resonant.

"And no less shall the Lord mete out his punishment to the wrongdoer yeah even more mightily when the innocent is struck down just as Abel was slain by his own brother as he walked in the field. Lord, we pray to you this ..."

At that moment, there was a knock on the door and Doris entered. Swanzey stopped in mid-sentence. The maid curtseyed quickly.

"I'm sorry, ma'am, but I have the afternoon post. Would you like to see it now?"

Swanzey released Louisa's hands, but his mouth was pinched with disapproval at the interruption.

"I beg your pardon, but I am anxious for word from my parents," she said placatingly.

"Of course. That is quite understandable. I'm sure the Lord will wait for us."

He seemed to grimace, but Louisa realized this was his way of signalling he had made a joke. She nodded at the

maid.

"You can put it here."

Doris deposited the silver letter tray on the lamp table beside her mistress, curtsied again and left.

"Will you excuse me, while I see if they have replied, Reverend Swanzey?"

"Most certainly." But he made no attempt to leave.

Louisa picked up the letters, leafing through them first. None bore her mother's familiar handwriting, but one still caught her eye. The envelope was small and rather grubby and the writing ill formed.

"Who is this from, I wonder?" She glanced over at Swanzey, who had returned to the chair by the fire. "Would you be so kind as to hand me the letter opener? I believe it is on the mantelpiece."

He handed it to her. She slit open the envelope and took out a piece of lined paper, also grubby, and began to read. Her hand flew to her mouth and she drew in her breath sharply.

"Mrs. Howard, what is the matter?" asked Swanzey.

She closed her eyes as if she could efface what she had just seen.

"Mrs. Howard?" he said again, but she didn't answer and for a moment she swayed as if she would faint. Swanzey came over to her. The letter was in her lap and he picked it up.

"Read it, oh my dear God, please read it."

March 6.

Dear Madam. You must know that yore husband, Charles Howard is not what he seemed. He was a wicked man and I can prove it. It was because of him that my daughter lost her innocence. We are willing to keep silent on this matter because of yore conditioin which as a mother I can understand. But we will want rekcompence. You can send the sum of 200 dollars or we will go to the newspapers. You can send it to the following address, who is a friend.

Mrs. Esther Tugwell

343 Sherbourne Street.

Yours faithfully,

One who has been wronged.

P.S . you must act immediately. Don't forget I can prove what I say.

"What does it mean, Matthew?" Louisa could barely speak.

Swanzey's hand was shaking. "Alas, it means that there are evil people in the world who will take advantage of another's tragedy in the most despicable manner."

"But why would she say Charles was not what he seemed and she can prove it?"

"Do you know this person, Esther Tugwell?"

"Not at all. Who can she be?"

Swanzey folded the letter and replaced it in the envelope. He took her hand again.

"Your husband's death has been reported by every newspaper in the city. I've heard before of vultures who scour the death columns and concoct such letters to see if they can take advantage of the bereaved family."

Louisa started to weep. "Oh what is going to become of me?"

Swanzey patted her awkwardly on the shoulder. "Try not to upset yourself, madam."

"But she says that Charles violated her daughter. That couldn't possibly be true, could it?"

He patted some more. "Come now, Mrs. Howard. Do you yourself believe it?"

She dabbed at her eyes with one of the handkerchiefs. "Frankly, sir, I feel as if I am standing on quicksand. If you were to tell me the moon is truly made of green cheese, I would be inclined to believe you."

She could see her response shocked him. "My dear Mrs. Howard, take a good look at the letter. It has obviously come

from the lowest class of person. This woman has seized on an opportunity to extort money from you. Nothing more."

"Perhaps I should notify the detective who was here."

Swanzey pursed his lips. "Frankly, I would not recommend that. I don't believe our police force is entirely comprised of the better elements of society and it would not be advisable for this news to be bruited abroad."

"So you do believe it to be true?"

"No. Absolutely not. But vile gossip sticks no matter how pure the object."

His words frightened her. "But what shall I do then?"

"What you must do is to put the matter completely out of your mind." He tucked the letter into his pocket. "I shall deal with it myself. We have a name and an address. I shall call on this Mrs. Tugwell. 'A friend' indeed! Well I will put the fear of God into this friend, I promise you."

Swanzey stood up. "I shall see myself out. Please get some rest."

Louisa leaned back against the sofa cushions. She felt exhausted, as if she had been fighting a fierce tide for a long time.

Chapter Twenty-Four

THIS STRETCH OF ONTARIO STREET , below Wilton, was inhabited mostly by working-class people. The houses were well tended, but they were small and close together; no grand gardens here. Mrs. O'Brien was sitting at her front window, nursing the latest arrival, a girl, Beattie, whom she'd named after her former neighbour, Mrs. Kitchen. Her three other little ones were kipping in the backroom so she was enjoying a rare moment of peace and quiet. The afternoon was drawing in and she'd have to stir soon and light the lamps before the rest of the brood came home from school. Mrs. O'Brien was normally a cheerful-enough soul. She had to be, with eight children to take care of and a husband more often away than not. He said it was hard bloody work being a fisherman and having to deal with all the different kinds of weather that God sent. Why don't you stay home and take care of the other things that God sends, all eight of them, and I'll be a fisherman, she'd said to him once, jokingly of course.

She sighed. Perhaps it was the dreary grey afternoon that was making her blue, sitting here watching the wind stir the bare branches of the trees and blow thin plumes of snow from the rooftops. A bit of green would be a balm for her eyes. Mostly, though, she missed Mrs. Kitchen. They had managed to get in a good chin at least once a day, even though Beatrice had a lot on her hands taking care of Arthur. But she had always managed to slip Mary a bit of the roast that they didn't finish or some tarts she'd made. O'Brien made good wages, but the money didn't always reach her regularly and eight growing children would eat

you out of house and home given half a chance. They'd all of them been upset when Beatrice said she and Arthur were moving to Muskoka so he could get fresh air. She couldn't blame her, of course, it might be his only chance to get better but she did miss her. The new tenants were friendly enough, but the young one with the twin boys hardly stuck her nose out of the door and the schoolteacher never came round. Mr. Murdoch dropped in last week to see how she was, but a man just wasn't the same. She couldn't have a good gab with him, could she?

The baby had fallen asleep and she was about to lay her down when she saw a man coming up the street. He looked well off in his black fedora and long fur coat, but she didn't recognize him and she had the impression he was looking for an address. Sure enough, at the Kitchens' house, he paused, checked a piece of paper in his hand, and walked up the short path to the door. He made no attempt to knock but bent down and slipped something underneath the door. Then, quickly, he turned around and walked away briskly the way he had come.

And who are you when you're at home? she wondered. I hope that's not bad news you're delivering. He was far too well dressed to be a mere messenger, so who the devil was he? She'd stood up to get a better look and disturbed Beattie, who scrunched her face preparatory to a good wail. At the same time, one of the boys called out to her from the backroom. Hoisting the infant over her shoulder, Mrs. O'Brien shuffled off to tend to him.

Murdoch put the wet boots on a piece of newspaper on top of his desk and began to make notes. The boots were black, badly scuffed, and the soles on both toes were parting company with the uppers. The heels were worn down and the lace in the right boot was broken and reknotted in three places, the left was laced with string. Typical footwear for

tramps. He looked at the string under his magnifying glass, but there was nothing unusual about it. The boots measured twelve and one-quarter inches in length and four and a quarter inches wide, which meant the original owner was about Murdoch's height of six feet. That didn't mean that the last wearer was that tall, of course, he could have used them regardless of the fit. Murdoch thrust his hand into the right boot and sure enough his fingers touched something soggy. Carefully, he pulled out the newspaper that was stuffed into the toe and placed it on the desk. The paper was too sodden to make anything of it, he'd have to let it dry.

He upended the boots and examined the soles with his glass. There were several small seeds and bits of straw wedged into the grooves around the nails and he pried them out with his knife onto a piece of fresh paper. Under the glass, the seeds looked like wheat. The boots hadn't been in the water long enough to eliminate the stink from unwashed sweaty feet, but he thought he could detect a whiff of manure mingling in there like a tenor note in a requiem. Toronto streets were perpetually dotted with horse plop of course and as he knew to his cost, it was all too easy to walk in it. However, this smell had survived at least two days of immersion in water so he thought the manure was more ingrained. He stared at the bits of straw, wishing he had a way of determining if they'd come from a stable or a cow barn. He'd make a tentative guess then that the boots had belonged to a man who'd been on a farm fairly recently.

He turned the boots over and studied them again, but there wasn't anything else he could deduce. If blood had been splattered on them, it had washed off in the pond water. He pushed them to the edge of his desk and took a piece of notepaper from his desk.

Callahan: send this to all the newspapers right away:

Detective Murdoch of number four station is interested in speaking to anyone who noticed or was in contact with a man who meets the following description. Between five feet eight and six feet tall. Of middle age with full black beard, wearing a long black coat and black fedora and carrying a sack across his back. It is possible this man is a tramp and/or a farm labourer.

Murdoch hesitated, wondering whether to add that the man might be dangerous. He had often complained that the police were all too ready to jump on somebody from the lower classes when a crime was committed, "guilty until proved innocent," but a solid case seemed to be building up that Reverend Howard's murderer was a wayfarer and Murdoch's stubborn refusal to put all his eggs in that basket might be prejudice in reverse.

He added to the note:

This man is wanted for questioning in the murder of the Reverend Charles Howard. He should be considered dangerous .

The response from newspaper advertisements was limited. Not everybody could read and especially in the wayfaring class. He wrote another note to Callahan to be telegraphed to the city's other police stations, in which he added a description of Howard's stolen boots and the silver watch. Not that there was any guarantee the man was still be around. He could easily have caught a train and be miles away by now. It wasn't going to be easy to find him. He'd better send Dewhurst to the station and see if anybody fitting the tramp's description had boarded a train in the last two days. He wrote a third note for Callahan to send to police stations in the small towns and villages in the surrounding area. Responses from them would be much slower, as few of them had a telegram line.

He picked up his notes and was about to go down to the front desk when he heard hurried footsteps coming down the hall. Crabtree's large frame appeared in the doorway.

"Come in, George, what's the matter?"

The constable was rather breathless.

"Don't tell me you found our tramp?"

"No, I'm afraid not, sir, but I may have made a pretty big catch."

Murdoch indicated the worn chair that was opposite him. "Sit down and tell me first. I've already got a crick in my neck, I don't want to make it worse."

Crabtree balanced himself in the chair. "After I left you at the Gardens, sir, I was making my way down Jarvis Street. There were one or two people I'd missed when we was going around and I thought they might be home now. I'd just got as far as Wilton when the next thing I know there was screams and shouts going on, 'Thief, Thief,' and this fellow comes running around the corner. Well you don't run like a hare with people shouting *thief* if you haven't been up to something. I sees a couple of gentlemen running after him, but he's fast and is easily outdistancing them. Then he sees me on the opposite side of the road and that gives him the fright of his life so he turns south on Jarvis, like the devil has lit his trousers. I sets off after him, but I wouldn't have stood a chance of catching him when darned if he doesn't put his foot in a pothole and goes a crash. He tries to get up but he can't run a yard and I'm on him like a flash. I can see guilt written all over him. By that time the two gentlemen catch up to us and say as how he'd just stolen a purse from a poor widow woman who was walking on the street. The cove can't even deny it because when I shake him down a little red silk purse falls out of his pocket."

Crabtree patted his jacket. "I've got it here."

"Well done, George," said Murdoch. "I don't mean to spoil your triumph, but at the moment I can't see why this cove is such a prize nab."

The constable grinned. "I'm getting to that, sir. So I grabbed the fellow by the scruff and made him hop with me to where there were a group of people standing around a poor blind woman and a young tad who turned out to be her grandson. It was her purse all right. The boy identified it and said the man I'd nabbed had just come on them all of a sudden and snatched it from her belt. I had the devil of a time persuading the old lady to come to the station and press charges, but I told her as how it was her duty and so forth and we would if she didn't so she agreed."

Murdoch looked at the constable, who was relishing his moment of drama. "Go on."

"She seems like a good old soul and she's concerned that my poor klep has hurt himself. 'Maybe we should have a look at his ankle,' says she. At which point I notice his boots ... They're *his* boots, sir, Mr. Howard's."

"What! How do you know?"

"Remember the maid said Mr. Howard's had been recently soled and heeled but he had broken his lace and he replaced it with a brown one in his right boot? Well these black boots the nab had on his feet have an exact same brown lace and they've been recently soled and heeled."

Murdoch whistled through his teeth. "Did you ask your nab where he got them?"

"I did and he said he didn't remember and that he'd had them for years."

"Do you believe him?"

"Not a jot. I thought he was lying in his teeth. Anyway, I brought him into the station and had him take his boots off so we could take a look at his ankle and as I suspected, he was a lying bugger ... he has bad blisters on the heels of both feet."

Murdoch slapped the desk. "So they're not likely to be boots he's had for years." He jumped up. "Let's go and have a little chin with our widow robber. Where is he?"

“In the hall, sir. The lady has been weeping non-stop and says she don’t want no trouble. You’d think we were arresting her. The lad is crying too and the nab is moaning so it’s quite noisy out there.”

“Did you get any names?”

“Yes. She’s Mrs. Annabel Shorter and her grandson’s Bill. They’re from Markham and just here for the day. The thief says he’s Peter Somerset, but I doubt it’s a name his own mother would ever know him by.”

“Let’s go and talk to them, shall we, George? A recently repaired black boot with a brown lace is a bit too much of a coincidence to swallow.”

Chapter Twenty-Five

CRABTREE'S NAB WAS SITTING on the bench a few feet from an elderly lady and a young boy. He was indeed moaning, the woman was weeping rather noisily, and the boy was trying to comfort her, also loudly. She was in full widow's weeds with a long black crepe veil that covered her face and fell as far as her waist. The boy was also in black with knickerbockers and jacket. A velvet cap was pulled down low and the lower part of his face was wrapped in a black scarf so that only his eyes were visible.

"Grandma, hush. Here's the detective come to talk to you."

She turned in the direction of the door, although Murdoch was coming from the hall behind the counter.

He walked over to her. Her grandson was speaking so loudly, Murdoch assumed the old lady was deaf and he too raised his voice.

"Mrs. Shorter, I'm Detective Murdoch. I wonder if you could tell me what happened."

He glanced over at the man, who had sunk back on the bench and buried his face in his muffler.

"My grandma is too upset to talk much," said the boy. "She don't want to press charges. We have to get back to the train station before three o'clock."

Murdoch sat on the bench beside the old woman who was staring straight ahead. He couldn't make out her face through the dark veil, but he could see she was trembling. He tried to speak gently, which was difficult at full volume.

"Mrs. Shorter, your purse was stolen and we have caught the thief. You won't have to stay long if we write up a

charge. You'll just have to sign it. Why should he get away with frightening elderly citizens?"

"I'm blind, I didn't see him," she said, her voice was shrill.

"I realize that. But we have other witnesses. And your grandson must have seen him."

The boy shook his head, still focused on his grandmother. "No I didn't. I was looking after grandma when she fell down. Then I saw a man running away and men yelling and chasing after him. I just thought he hadn't been looking where he was going and knocked her over."

"Then you saw that your grandmother's purse had gone."

"I noticed it then, but she could have lost it earlier."

The woman stretched out her hand in search of her grandson's and he clasped it tightly.

"I'm a Christian woman, Mr. Murdoch," she said, "and I believe that we should forgive those that trespass against us. If indeed this young man did rob me, I have my purse returned, I am not harmed, and that is all that matters. There was nothing in it but some streetcar tickets and a little change. We really do have to catch our train, my daughter is expecting us."

Murdoch peered at her, but her face was obscured by the thick crepe veil. Then he glanced over his shoulder at the thief. In spite of his attempt to burrow into his collar, Murdoch could see a broad forehead and ragged sandy-brown hair.

Mrs. Shorter went to stand up, but Murdoch blocked her with his arm.

"Why do I have the impression we have met before?"

She recoiled, bowed her head briefly, then with one swift movement, she jerked upward, threw off his arm, shoved him away from her, and kicked him hard in the shins. With a yell to the boy, she ran for the door. Startled by the pain, he couldn't move fast enough. Somerset tried to follow her, but even though he hopped with astonishing speed, he was no match for Crabtree, who got him from behind. The woman

would have got away, but her long veil, flowing out behind her, caught on the edge of the stove in the centre of the room. The bonnet came off, but it was tied underneath her chin and she was stopped in her tracks, giving Murdoch a chance to seize her arm and twist it behind her back.

She cried out in pain, but as it was now obvious she was no old woman, he held on. In the meantime, Gardiner and Callahan had run from behind the counter to help. The sergeant grabbed the boy, who fought desperately, until Callahan managed to hold his legs and Gardiner pinned his arms. In minutes the struggle was over.

"Mrs. Shorter, or should I say, Mrs. Pierce?" shouted Murdoch. "Whoever the hell you are, you're under arrest," He was panting from the struggle and the rush of anger beyond his control at the painful kicks that had been inflicted on him. "I'm going to let go of you so I don't break your arm, but if you move a muscle, you will be cuffed. Do you understand?" He gave her a little shake that made her yelp again. "Do you understand?"

"Leave her alone," yelled the boy and he somehow jerked out of the grasp of both constables who were holding him and ran to help the woman. His cap had fallen off and Gardiner grabbed him by the hair, shoved him to the floor, then dropped, putting his knee on the boy's back. He administered a couple of hard slaps to his head while Callahan once more held on to the boy's ankles. Murdoch let go of the woman's arm and shoved her onto the bench.

"Let him go," she screamed at the other two officers.

She probably would have got up again, but Murdoch yelled at the top of his voice.

"Stay there." He looked over his shoulder. "Sergeant, let him get up."

Gardiner looked as if he was going to defy him, but then he reluctantly got off the boy and stepped back, clearly ready to pounce again if necessary. Callahan released the lad's ankles and also stood back.

"You, boy, come over here and sit beside your mother," said Murdoch.

Now that she had lost her black bonnet and veil, the woman's dark hair was revealed. She was not in the least elderly, probably in her thirties, maybe even younger but she had no teeth, which aged her face considerably. The boy's face had gone quite white and a bruise was vivid above his eye. He looked unsteady, but he rushed over to her and she pulled him close to her side. Both of them sat staring at Murdoch with a mix of defiance and fear. The third member of the little trio wasn't saying anything. He wasn't that tall a man and Crabtree, who had pulled his arms back and put the cuffs on him, towered over him.

"Now then. The excitement's over," said Murdoch. "Madam, do I have your word, you won't try to make a bolt for it?"

"I'd sooner trust a rabid fox," said Gardiner. "Put the cuffs on her. And the whelp."

The woman had stepped across the line from respectable victim to criminal scum in his eyes. He started over to them but Murdoch warned him off.

"It's all right, I'll deal with it." He addressed the woman. "Shall I call you Mrs. Shorter or Mrs. Pierce?"

"Whatever you like. It don't matter to me."

"So neither one is your real name?"

She shrugged.

"Look, ma'am, you're going to have to talk to me sooner or later. You delivered some pretty vicious kicks to my shin and I could lay charges against you that would have you in the Mercer for a couple of years. Your lad would go to the industrial school and I doubt he'd like that." Murdoch nodded at the other man. "Is he your husband?"

"Not him. I've never seen him before. And you can't charge me with nothing. You grabbed ahold of me and I was just defending my honour."

"You were pretending to be blind and you claimed this man had robbed you."

"I didn't say he'd robbed me. And there's no harm in pretending to be blind. It ain't a crime. It was just a game I was playing with Tim."

"I see. This isn't the first time you've been in a police station, I take it?"

"'Course it is. And it will be last, the treatment you coves dish out. I'll speak to the chief himself, I will."

The preposterousness of the statement made Murdoch grin. He couldn't help it.

"I tell you what, ma'am. This has been very strenuous. I, for one, need a cup of tea. Give me a name that I can call you by for politeness' sake and I'll have our constable here make us a pot. What do you say?"

"Are you going to charge me?"

"I haven't heard your story yet, nor your friend's."

Gardiner was still hovering behind Murdoch, his face dark with anger. "'Course he's going to charge you. You and your bastard assaulted police officers."

The lad had an angry red mark on his cheek where Gardiner had hit him.

"I'll handle it, sergeant." Murdoch turned back to the woman. "Given that this is a public hall and we need some privacy, I suggest we have our tea in one of our jail cells."

"All three of us?"

"Yes." She was about to protest but he held up his hand. "I know, I know. This man is a complete stranger. But as this is the second time I've seen you in the same company, I don't believe you. You're queer plungers and your names are on a bill that I was just looking at on Monday."

The woman's eyes scanned the men gathered around her. Gardiner, red-faced and angry, Callahan eager for another fray, Crabtree just very large.

"All right, me name's Bagley, Mrs. Olivia Bagley. This is my nipper, Tim, and that's Ed Parker, a friend."

The redhead gave Murdoch a knuckle salute like a sailor.

Still keeping a wary eye on the woman, Murdoch said, "George, remove the cuffs from Mr. Parker and then escort him to the rear cell. Get him a cold bandage and some opium lotion if you can find it for his ankle. Mrs. Bagley, you and Tim follow behind Constable Crabtree and I will walk behind you. One move in any other direction and I will put the cuffs on. You can't get away, there are four of us here."

"Can I have me bonnet? It cost a dollar."

"Constable Callahan, will you hand the lady her bonnet. It's over by the stove."

The clerk did as he was asked and gingerly held out the hat to the woman. Then, led by Crabtree and the silent Mr. Parker, limping painfully, they moved slowly down the hall.

Chapter Twenty-Six

GIVEN THAT MRS. BAGLEY'S ATTITUDE had been as tough as any man's, Murdoch wasn't sure if he was going to get anything from her, but after two cups of tea and a thick slice of cake that Crabtree donated from his own dinner, she capitulated. They were seated on the hard bunk beds of the jail cell and even though he'd left the door open, the iron bars were enough to scare anybody into co-operation.

He showed her the poster about the queer plungers and she admitted with a touch of pride that they were the trio it referred to.

"We've got several turns. You didn't see the best, which is Tim here rolling under a carriage."

"I taught him how to do it," said Parker. "I used to be an acrobat with a circus." He gazed at the boy fondly. "He's good at it. He can hold his breath for two minutes."

He didn't say so, but Murdoch assumed that was so the boy could play dead.

"How often do you do the little thief act, the one I witnessed?" Murdoch asked.

"As often as we can, don't we, Ed? We have to move around so as nobody recognizes us. Sometimes Tim is a coloured boy, sometimes he's not. People aren't that observant really." She had previously soaked her cake in the tea and more or less sucked on it. "I lost all my teeth when I was only twenty-two. I thought it was the worst thing that had ever happened to me, but it turned out to be useful." She fished in her pocket and took out a kerchief. It was wrapped around a set of gleaming white false teeth. She popped them in her mouth and smiled at Murdoch.

"They're not so good for eating, they're really just for show, but they take years off my age, don't they?" Her words were a bit slurred but with the dentures filling out her hollow cheeks, Olivia looked quite pretty.

"Indeed they do."

Olivia removed the teeth and wrapped them up again. She bent over, tilted her head slightly, and sucked in her cheeks. "I can go all rheumatic and frail in a tick. Usually I powder my face white and put some red rouge under my eyelids, but I had on the blasted veil today so I didn't need it. Phew. How women breathe under those things is beyond me. If ever I married which I won't and if ever I was really a widow, I wouldn't wear one of them veils, I can tell you that."

She slurped the last of her tea and put down the cup, looking over at Murdoch shrewdly.

"So are you going to charge us or what? We're just actors, you know. We don't take anything that don't belong to us."

"You're frauds and your intention is to deceive people to get money from them. That's a crime."

"Oh come on, mister. The coves who give us money don't miss it. We cost no more than a hot-cross bun to them. You saw them when I was poor Mrs. Pierce. They enjoyed themselves being kind to an old lady. It made them feel like good Christian folk. That's worth a few cents, wouldn't you say? And what did you think about that bloody bossy woman who wanted to take me to the station? She was having a great old time being a good Samaritan." Olivia sniffed disdainfully. "I thought it was put on for your benefit. She fancied you, she did."

Murdoch was rather taken aback by that but before he had a chance to comment, Tim, who had been sitting on the bunk, dangling his legs, fell backwards. His entire body was gripped by dreadful spasms so that his head was banging on the bed. Spittle ran from the side of his mouth. Murdoch jumped to his feet, calling to Olivia.

"What's happening? Is he having a seizure?"

Neither she nor Ed Parker moved and she said calmly, "Yes. The poor child has fits all the time."

Tim's eyes had rolled back in his head and the spasmodic jerking of his body was violent.

Murdoch grabbed the straw pillow that was on the bed, thinking to put it under the boy's head. "Mrs. Bagley, please do something or tell me what to do."

She put down her teacup and came closer to the bed. Blood was coming from Tim's mouth. She bent over the stricken child, then snapped her fingers.

"Enough, Tim."

As if she had turned off an electric light switch, the jerking stopped. The boy opened his eyes, looked at Murdoch, and grinned. His teeth were red with blood.

"What the deuce ...?"

All three plungers burst out laughing. "Fooled you, didn't we?" exclaimed Olivia. "That's another of his good turns. I taught him that one. I seen this boy in the orphanage where I grew up throwing fits so I knew what they looked like."

Murdoch didn't know whether to laugh as well or be annoyed at the trick.

"Tim, you've cut your lip or your tongue."

The boy smiled again with his bloodstained mouth. Then he stuck his finger inside and fished out a rubber nipple. "No, I ain't. I popped this in my mouth when you weren't looking. See."

Gingerly, Murdoch accepted the slimy teat. "How do you do it?"

"It's filled with cherry extract and tied at the end. I just have to bite down is all."

"We used to use real beef blood, but he didn't like the taste," said Olivia. "This does just as well if you aren't too close. Usually I wipe his mouth off and he spits it into my hand. Or he can stow it at the back of his teeth if he has to." She held out her hand and Murdoch gave over the nipple. "We can't afford to waste it." Olivia gave him a gummy

smile. "I told you we was in the entertainment business. We took your mind off your troubles for a minute there, didn't we?"

Murdoch had had enough. "They're not my troubles, Mrs. Bagley, they're yours. I'm investigating a murder and you three seem to be implicated."

That certainly got a reaction and they gaped at him. "What you mean, a murder? We ain't killed anybody."

Murdoch pointed at Parker's boots. "Where did you get those?"

Ed shifted uneasily. "I bought them."

"When?"

"I dunno. Last year sometime. I got them at a Jew's shop on Church Street."

He was sitting next to Olivia on the narrow bunk bed, Murdoch was on a stool in between the beds. He stood up. "They belonged to a man who was brutally killed. I'll ask you again, where did you get them?"

Olivia looked alarmed. "Hold on, mister. Ed ain't killed nobody. What makes you think his boots belonged to the stiff?"

"The dead man's boots were taken off his feet and the right one had a brown lace instead of a black because the poor cove had broken his lace that morning and had to use a temporary replacement. That looks exactly like the boot we removed from your foot, Mr. Parker. And your boots don't fit very well, do they? They've rubbed blisters on your heels. How did that happen with year-old boots?"

Ed shrugged. "I dunno."

"He's got a hole in his sock, that's why," said Olivia.

"Let me see."

Ed reluctantly pulled his sock from his pocket. It had been darned at the toe and the heel but there was no hole.

"What I meant to say is that he did have a hole but I darned it and the darn must have been rubbing."

"Mrs. Bagley, I am a detective at this station but I'm only one man. The other officers, such as Sergeant Gardiner, have their duties to do. I don't feel as if we're getting anywhere here so I'm thinking I should turn the three of you over to the sergeant and see if he is better at getting the truth out of you."

He could see Tim involuntarily shrink back against the wall and the worried glance he sent to his mother.

"Don't be silly," she said briskly to Murdoch. "We're willing to co-operate, aren't we, Ed? But you're not telling us anything. Who was this cove and how and where was he done for?"

"If I tell you that, you can manufacture a story to protect yourselves."

Olivia shook her head. "We could do that if we had something to hide, but we don't. You've been decent to us and maybe we could repay your kindness by helping you out if we can."

Murdoch knew exactly what she was getting at. "We'll see about that. You tell me the truth with no little darns in it and I'll *consider* dropping charges of public mischief against the three of you, Tim included. But I said consider, not promise. Agreed?"

Nothing seemed to ruffle Olivia, but Murdoch had seen the fear in her eyes. She had been on the wrong side of the law too many times not to know where the real power lay. She nodded at Ed.

"Tell him where you got them boots, Eddie."

"I picked them up in the workhouse on Tuesday night. We'd had a bad couple of days and we had nowhere to go. Livvy and Tim got into the nuns' house, but the men's side was full so I went down to the city workhouse." He paused and looked at Olivia to get the go-ahead.

"Well, I was coming in as a casual see, so I had to take a bath and get deloused. It's a bugger, begging your pardon, because I was quite clean and the sulphur chokes up my

lungs. But they won't let you in unless you go through it. Anyway all the tramps have to get undressed and put their clothes and boots and hats on a shelf while they're in the bath. There's an attendant who's supposed to watch, but this one was blind as a bat. I seen a good pair of boots that looked my size and mine had got a big hole in the sole. So I did a swap."

"And these were the boots you took?"

"That's right. They're a bit on the small side, but they kept the water out."

"Did you see whose boots they were?"

Ed shook his head. "No, like I said they was all on the shelf."

"And nobody kicked up a fuss?"

"No, I expected them to, but they was quiet as priests who've lost their crosses in the brothel."

Murdoch frowned, not liking Ed's simile. "Do you mean to say that the owner of the boots couldn't afford to admit it?"

"Well, I didn't think that then, but now you're saying they was taken off a stiff it makes sense the cove wouldn't moan."

"And you're sure you don't know who that was?"

"There was a lot of men milling about, the ones going into the bath and the ones getting out. He probably nabbed somebody else's. Tramps are always doing a swap when they can get something better. It goes with the territory."

"There you go, he's told you the truth," said Olivia. "Are you going to live up to your end of the bargain?"

"Let you go, you mean. Not likely. It would mean my job. The other officers know what you've been up to."

"Frig. I thought you might be a man of your word."

Olivia looked as if she might haul off and slug him so Murdoch smiled.

"Let's say I'm not releasing you just yet. But if you co-operate I will promise that not only will there be no charges,

I might be able to get you a small honorarium for public service."

"What's that?" asked Tim.

"Money, lad."

Olivia stared at Murdoch. "What the hell do you want us to do, put on a show for the inspector?" She sucked in her cheeks. "I do a good imitation of Mary Queen of Scots, come back from the grave. Is that what you had in mind?"

Murdoch laughed. "No. I don't think history is quite up his alley. This is what I have in mind, listen up." He explained his plan and both Olivia and Ed expressed their admiration.

"We'll turn you into a plunger yet," said Olivia, "and I know just the place to go."

There was a tinge of sadistic pleasure in her expression that made Murdoch uneasy.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

OVER THEIR PROTESTS , MURDOCH left Ed and Tim in the cell and set out with Olivia. As they hurried along Wilton Street toward River Street, the widow's veil rippled behind her, like an ominous black sail on a pirate ship.

The second-hand clothes shop Olivia took him to was run by a "sheeny man." *Shop* was giving the place too dignified a name, as it was a derelict stable in a laneway off Sumach. Empty lots flanked it on either side and the house to which it had once belonged was boarded up. There was no sign and the door was closed, but Olivia didn't hesitate. She opened the door just wide enough for them to enter and Murdoch followed her inside. The place was dark and reeked of old manure and old clothes. There was only one oil lamp and in its dim light, Murdoch could just make out the old trousers, shirts, socks that were piled on rickety tables or hung on hooks on the walls. There were so many, Murdoch wondered if half the poorer population of the city had sold their clothes. He hoped nobody he'd ever nabbed came in while he was here. They'd think he'd got the shoot and gloat.

At the rear a man, wrapped in a shawl, was sitting on a high stool. He was hunched over an open brazier and barely made any acknowledgement of their presence. The rest of the shop was empty.

Murdoch recognized him. He'd often seen him trudging the streets with his cart, ringing his bell and calling out for bones, bottles, and rags. He was small, thin, and wiry, probably younger than he first appeared with his long, dark hair and a full, ragged beard.

"Afternoon, Mr. Gold," said Olivia and she threw back her veil, gazed around, and like a swimmer embarking on a refreshing dip, she dived into the chaos, Murdoch following helplessly behind her. Within minutes, she pulled out a pair of worn corduroy trousers from one heap. "These should fit."

Gold said in his hoarse, accented voice. "Everything's been fumigated, missus. No need worry."

Murdoch eyed the trousers doubtfully. "They look as if they belonged to a teamster."

Olivia snorted a friendly contempt. "You ain't lived on charity before, have you? You takes what you can get and make 'em fit. If they're too long, roll 'em up. Tighten them with your belt." She shoved aside some greasy-looking trousers to make room on the table for her find, then moved on to a rack of jackets and suits. A quick sort and she held up a brown-and-white check jacket that must have been owned by a player in a summer vaudeville show. The beer stains down the front were visible even from two feet away. "Here's a coat'll go nice with that brown."

Murdoch was about to protest but thought better of it. He wasn't outfitting himself to make a court appearance.

"How much?" she asked Gold.

"Take trousers and jacket both, yours for one dollar."

"One dollar! Don't make me laugh. I could buy new ones for that."

"Feel coat cloth, missus. What's wrong with you? That's best worsted, only been worn once."

Perhaps he meant that the previous owner had never taken it off, thought Murdoch.

"It's not worth thirty cents," said Olivia and she flung the jacket away in disgust. She scrutinized Murdoch. "Let's see. Perhaps you don't need a jacket. You could get away with wearing that old sealskin coat, it's shabby enough."

Murdoch winced. That coat had stood him in good stead for a long time.

"We should change the fedora," added Olivia.

"I've got excellent stock of hats. Very low prices," Gold interjected. "I can't make a living to sell at these prices but for you ..."

He got down from his stool and squeezed around one of the tables. There was hardly room to move in the small space. He lifted a black felt hat from a lopsided shelf and blew the dust off it. "Here, missus. This one English made. Best quality fur felt."

Olivia took the hat and inspected it. The trim around the crown had long gone and the inside sweatband was dark from use. Murdoch removed his fedora and tried on the new one. It was tight.

"That'll do," Olivia said.

Murdoch adjusted the hat slightly. It had an unpleasant sticky feel to it.

"What have you got in the way of flannel shirts?" Olivia asked Mr. Gold.

"Flannel shirts? Who ever sells me flannel shirts? I've got good linen from gentlemen. Hardly worn. Look here." He poked at a pile of clothes on a nearby table.

Olivia did a rapid and experienced sort of the shirts that were heaped together but none of them satisfied her. Then she picked up a heavy woollen jersey, the kind typically worn in outdoor athletics. Mr. Gold might have been telling the truth about fumigation but he certainly hadn't bothered to clean the goods. This sweater was caked in dried mud, as if its previous owner had come directly off the soccer field.

Olivia beamed. "We'll take this one."

She added it to the pile she was building and continued her exploration, Murdoch trailing behind her feeling peculiarly childlike. Mr. Gold shuffled round the tables, sometimes swooping in to show her a very fine cravat, or a pair of *kashimir* socks. All the time the two of them wrangled with each other about the price, or the quality. Olivia was utterly unmoved by Gold's moans.

“Twenty cents for a pair of threadbare combinations like this! I’ll give you a dime and that’s being generous.”

She took three pairs of socks and at Murdoch’s questioning, she whispered, “One pair for your feet, one for your hands, one pair for Ed. You don’t mind, do you? They’re only two cents each.”

Finally, they were done and all that remained was to find a pair of boots. There were three shelves at the back of the shop displaying dozens of boots, all of which retained the shape of their previous owner’s feet so that Murdoch felt as if he were looking at the disembodied remains of a defeated army.

Gold glanced at Murdoch’s shoes, then picked a pair of scuffed brown boots from the shelf. “These just came in today. Very fine, very fine. See leather lining, keep you warm all winter. For you, forty cents.”

Olivia inverted the boots, which were bent up at the toe and worn at the heels.

“Fifteen cents and not a penny more.”

“You’re ruining me, missus. Twenty or nothing.”

“Sold!”

“Shouldn’t I make sure they fit first?” asked Murdoch.

She shook her head. “Beggars can’t be choosers. You’ll have to get used to them.”

She went back to the hook where she’d found the check jacket. “If you throw in this, I’ll give you a dollar thirty for the lot.”

Gold frowned. “Missus, I have wife, five little children. How can I face their sweet hungry faces if I come home with only one dollar and thirty cents? When they say, Poppa, how much you earn today since six o’clock this morning? How I tell them that it was only one dollar and thirty cents? And my wife, she has such pain in her teeth. I must take her to dentist but on one dollar and thirty cents, I cannot do it.”

“I thought you told me you had four children?”

“Four, five, what’s difference? They all have to eat.”

Olivia held up her hand. "One dollar and forty-one cents, for your children's sake."

"Fifty-one cents for my wife's teeth."

"All right. But that's the limit."

Perhaps, Murdoch thought, teeth were her weak spot.

The sale made, Gold gathered the goods to parcel them up.

Murdoch gave the money to Olivia, who in turn handed it over. Murdoch hoped he'd be reimbursed by the inspector, who was apt to fuss about expenses he hadn't authorized in advance.

Gold handed him the brown paper parcel. "Good luck to you, mister, whatever you doing. I hope it's legal."

Murdoch followed Olivia out of the shop into the laneway where the air felt blessedly fresh.

"We have to hurry," she said. "If you're going to get into the workhouse, you've got to be there by five o'clock. If there are too many casuals they'll turn you away."

"I'll change at the police station," said Murdoch. "You and Ed can go on ahead so nobody sees us together."

I'll arrange for the police matron to look after Tim."

"He can come with me, I won't do a bunk."

"Olivia, I'm not going to put temptation in your way. Tim stays."

"Mr. Murdoch, when you die and they cut you open, they're going to find you don't have a real heart of flesh and blood, they'll find something all black and shrivelled up."

Chapter Twenty-Eight

THERE WAS A FULL-LENGTH MIRROR in the hall outside of the duty room where constables were expected to make sure their uniforms were in order. Murdoch surveyed himself. Crabtree stood behind him.

"I'd arrest a man looking like this, George."

Everything about him appeared seedy; the baggy trousers, the loud check of the stained coat, the rough, high-necked muddy jersey that had a hole in the front, and the shabby black hat drooping low on his forehead.

"You're most convincing, sir, except for your skin colour and your eyes. I'm afraid you look too healthy."

"Not much I can do about it at this late date. I should have consulted Olivia and Parker. At least I didn't trim my moustache yesterday, which I was going to do." He rubbed at his chest. "Damn, I swear this jersey is as scratchy as a hair shirt." He grinned wryly. "Good practice for Lent, I suppose."

He took his belt in another notch. He'd tied string around the trousers below the knees and he looked like a navvy.

"You can have these when I've done, George. They'll fit perfectly."

"My wife wouldn't let me in the door, sir."

"The worst thing is these bloody boots. My toes feel as if they are in a vice. I can understand why our plunger friend seized the first opportunity to exchange his own boots for some that looked better. The feet set the tone for everything else."

"You believe his story, do you, sir?"

Murdoch nodded. "I'm inclined to. I only hope he's not as good a liar as he is a plunger. If we can find the man he stole the boots from, we might have our murderer."

"I hope the fellow hasn't moved on, sir."

"He'd better not have or all my misery will have been in vain."

Murdoch knew that no tramp would talk freely to him as a police detective and he hoped that going to the workhouse in disguise would work. They might open up if they thought he was one of them.

He looked at the clock on the wall. "I've got to get going. I'll slip out the back way so nobody sees me. I told Parker to go on ahead and get himself a place. Olivia is going to apply for outdoor relief at the local depot and see if she can pick anything up from the other paupers." He scratched again. "Information, I mean, I'm already getting plenty of the other kind."

"If you don't reappear in two days, shall I come in search of you, Sir?"

"You'd better, George. I can't imagine the casual ward at the House of Industry is on a par with the Avonmore."

"You never know. One of the councillors was complaining in the *News* the other day that the casuals are getting better treatment than some decent folk."

"Well, I'm about to find out."

Once he was outside, Murdoch was glad he'd taken Olivia's advice and bought a second pair of socks to wear as mitts. There was a fierce cold wind blowing, but he deliberately didn't protect his face. Twenty minutes wasn't going to turn his skin the colour of tanned leather, but it would have to do. He'd walked no more than ten minutes when he began to hobble. The socks were well darned and that combined with the stiff unyielding boot quickly rubbed a blister on his heel. It was getting close to five when he reached the corner

of Bay Street and Elm, sharp stabs of pain shooting up from his foot. A large constable was walking his beat along Dundas Street and Murdoch quickly turned his head away, pretending to wipe his nose with his sleeve. He recognized the policeman from the police games last summer. He'd almost won the fat man's race. Fortunately, he didn't recognize him, but Murdoch was aware that the officer had given him a good once over.

The casuals who were applying for a night's lodging at the House of Industry were expected to go to the rear of the building and when he arrived there, Murdoch groaned. About forty men and a few women were already lined up on each side of the big double doors. Ed Parker was fairly near the front. Crabtree had found him a pair of crutches and he was drooping over them.

Murdoch joined the end of the line. There was a tramp in front of him, with a grizzled beard and shaggy hair sticking out at wild angles from under his plaid cap. His weatherbeaten face was deeply lined, but he was big-boned and seemed strong so it was hard to say what his age was. He nodded in a friendly manner to Murdoch.

"New, are you?"

Murdoch shrugged, not sure which answer, yes or no, would take him further.

"You ain't bin a wayfarer long, I knows that," said the man.

"Just got the bird two months ago," replied Murdoch.

"Wife and nippers to feed, I bet."

"You've hit the nail on the head."

The man scrutinized Murdoch for a few moments, his grey eyes disconcertingly shrewd. "What did you do before you was sent packing?"

"I was a lumberjack up in Huntsville. Good one, if I do say so myself. Then I went and hurt my back. The bloody bosses said it was my own fault and they wouldn't wait for me to

get better. Out I go, arse over turkey. So I came down to the Queen city, see if I could get work."

"Family still up there, are they?"

"That's right."

"You ain't going to be much help to 'em in the workhouse."

"I know that, but I'm not gonna be much help if I starve to death either, am I?"

A shambling youth in front of them suddenly giggled and at first Murdoch thought it was in response to his mild witticism, but then he recognized the loose smile and vacant eyes of a simpleton. If his brother Bertie had lived, he would have been like this man, although, God forbid, Murdoch wouldn't have let him beg for a bed in the workhouse. The lad saw his glance and ducked his head quickly.

"Don't mind him," said the tramp. "He'd laugh if a bird shit on his head, wouldn't you, Alfred?" The simpleton giggled again in delight, but Murdoch was glad the tramp's voice had been kind not contemptuous. "We need folks like him in this gloomy world, where men haul off and kill each other over an eggshell."

"Or a pair of boots." Murdoch thought he'd throw in a little bait.

The other man grimaced. "When you've been a tramp longer, you'll know *that* is a very good reason for killing somebody. Good boots is worth their weight in gold." He looked down at Murdoch's feet. "Yours ain't so good, brother, if you don't mind me saying so."

"They're bloody vile. I might as well be wearing horse shoes."

Alfred was giggling up a storm as they talked and he was drawing attention to them, which was something Murdoch didn't want. He stuck out his hand to the older tramp.

"My name's Williams." The tramp had a dirty old sack, tied at the neck with string, slung over his shoulder and he

lowered it to the ground. He was wearing filthy woollen mittens, cut off at the fingers.

"Jack Trevelyan at your service, but everybody calls me Traveller. Like name like nature." They shook hands. The tramp's grip was strong and Murdoch lowered the estimate of his age a few years.

"Alf, shake hands with our new friend Williams," Traveller said to the simpleton, who promptly grabbed Murdoch's hand and pumped it vigorously, smiling happily.

"Good morning, good morning to you."

Finally, he let go and began to stare into space, muttering to himself words that Murdoch couldn't understand.

"Wouldn't have any baccy on you, would you?" Traveller asked.

Murdoch started to reach in his pocket, then he realized he'd left his pipe and pouch back at the station in his own clothes.

"No, I don't. Sorry."

"No need to be sorry, they won't let us smoke anyway, but I was gonna warn you that if you did have a pinch you should hide it. They're not above searching your pockets and if they find baccy or booze, out you go. Same with money. If you've got more than a few coins, you'd better stow it in your boot. They'll take it from you otherwise. You have to be skint to stay the night."

"I don't have a cent on me."

Murdoch hoped his nefarious plan would be excused by the seriousness of his investigation. Heaven forbid he be a burden on the taxpayers.

He glanced at the lineup in front of them. Many of the men were carrying sacks with billy cans tied to them.

"What've you got in your sack?" he asked Traveller. "Your good clothes?"

The tramp laughed, showing a sparse crop of stained teeth. "I don't have any clothes but these uns on me back. It's mostly old newspapers I'm carrying. You never know

when they'll come in handy. That and me tin which I use for me tea and sugar. I've got me pipe in there and me baccy pouch, but they're wrapped in the papers so I'm hoping they won't find it."

"Do they always search?"

"'Course they do, but they leave the job to the old-timers who live here and have to work off their keep. Most of them, thank the Lord, are usually too feeble to know what they're doing. What they're really on the lookout for is the demon drink. You're crossed off the list for the rest of the season if you try to smuggle in liquor. 'Course that ain't so hard if you know how."

Two men joined the line behind them. One was young and rough-looking and Murdoch could see he'd been in a fight recently. There was a goose egg over his eye and a raw scrape on his jaw. His companion was older and his face had the purplish colour and puffy look of a drunkard and he smelled like it too. He'd heard this last remark.

"It's bleeding hard to get through the night. No baccy, no grog, no food. We're supposed to go to sleep, but how can you when you're sharing a ward with forty men whose bellies are rumbling like a goddam army band and whose nerves are screaming for a bit of comfort?"

"Don't we get any supper?" Murdoch asked in dismay. This was another thing he hadn't taken into consideration and he hadn't had anything to eat since this morning.

"God forbid any of us tobies should be treated like human beings," growled the other tough. "It's tea and turn out here. It'd cost all the fat coves too much dash if us had a bit of food in our bellies before bed. Sean here is right. You ain't going to get much sleep, what with the bronchitis, the consumption, the drunks craving their tots. You'll see." He touched his knuckles to his forehead the way sailors do. "Name's Bettles. My partner's Sean Kearney."

"Williams." Murdoch was prepared to shake hands, but the other man made no move to do so. Instead he jabbed his

finger at Traveller. "You, I know."

Traveller returned the salute but his expression was mocking. "Old pals, aren't we, Ned? How'd you get that mouse? Did you win?"

Bettles scowled. "None of your business."

"He ran into a door," said his pal. "Ned won."

Bettles rubbed his hands together. He had no gloves. "Ain't they open yet? It's frigging perishing."

It was much colder now that the last vestige of daylight was gone and neither of the newcomers had overcoats.

"We wouldn't be standing out here if they was open, would we," said Traveller.

"You might be. You gagers all look ignorant enough."

Murdoch stiffened at this gratuitous bit of nastiness, but Jack grinned in such a way that the display of his yellowing canines gave the impression he'd use them if he had to.

"Ah brother, we are but mirrors," Traveller said.

Before Bettles could respond, there was a shifting and ripple of movement down the lineup and Murdoch saw that one of the doors had opened. A tall man in a long black mackintosh and black leather cap stepped through. He held up his hands for attention, which he got immediately.

"For those of you who are new here, I'm Gowan and I'm your tramp major. That means you listen to me if you know what's good for you. Now, I'm telling you right now we don't brook no insubordination here so don't think you can break the rules and get away with it. You won't. Rules are to be obeyed. For your own good, mind you. We've got everybody's welfare at heart here. And no bellyaching about the bed or the food. You're bloody lucky you're being given a free place for the night. Bloody lucky. I don't get anything for free. I work. Is that clear? Do we all know where we stand?"

Some of the men nodded but most didn't respond. Murdoch saw anger cross Bettles's face. Traveller didn't show any expressions but he muttered, "I know for sure I'm

bloody well standing outside the bloody workhouse, mate. That is very clear to me. I'm not confused about that at all."

Alf giggled and Murdoch grinned at him, but the others were too intent on watching Gowan.

"Hands up if you were here last night."

A dozen or so men held up their hands, including Traveller, Kearney, and Bettles. Good, thought Murdoch, that limited the number of men he had to watch.

"You repeaters, you know what to do then," said Gowan. "You get to go into the bathhouse first. Chances are you'll be less filthy than those who are here for the first time although some of you will get lousy in twenty-four hours if I know anything about it." He stepped back. "Come on then. Report to Hastings at door A. The rest of you lot go in door B and give your name to the man there. Tell him where you've come from and where you're going to after here."

"Heaven, I hope," whispered Traveller. "They'll be sure not to run into Mr. Gowan there."

The men started to move in the direction of the gate, but Gowan raised his arms and bellowed again. "Hold on, where's your manners?" He put his hand to his eyes as if he were searching for something. "Any ladies here?" He guffawed. "No, of course not. You women then, come on through. Door on the right."

Three women, all elderly, shuffled through the gate, their heads bent, their bodies shrunk into their shawls.

Gowan let them through, then stepped aside from the gate. "Let's move, you toffs." There was a surge forward and Murdoch was forced to move with them, not sure what to do next. It wouldn't do him much good to be with the newcomers. He was saved by Traveller, who caught him by the sleeve.

"Get in with the repeat group. The bath's a lot cleaner if you're in first."

"I'm not registered."

"Leave it to me."

Behind the iron gates was the lumberyard where Murdoch knew the casuals were expected to chop and cut wood during the day to earn their keep. The so-called labour test had been in existence for two years now and the city councillors considered it a great success. The elderly and infirm were excused, but the others had to work or leave.

On the far side of the yard were two arches and in front of each one was an elderly man in a black mackintosh and beakless cap like Gowan's. They held ledgers in front of them. The smaller group of tramps moved to the archway on the left, which had a large A over the lintel. Parker was hopping on his crutches and he'd exchanged a quick glance with Murdoch as he was pushed past him by the throng of men. At the entrance, they stopped abruptly and formed a ragged line. Bettles and Kearney had shoved to the front, but Traveller had got a firm grip on Murdoch's arm and they were close behind.

"Hurry up, goddamn it," said Bettles as the elderly clerk fumbled with the pages in the ledger. He was checked off, Kearney followed, and behind him came Alfred, who for all his simplemindedness knew enough to muscle his way to the front of the line. Next was Traveller.

"Jack Trevelyan," he said and the clerk began to search for the name.

Traveller leaned over and pointed with his finger. "There I am. And there's the fellow behind me. Thompson, Joseph." He turned around to Murdoch. "Right, mate?"

"Right."

The clerk gazed at Murdoch with bleary eyes. "I don't remember -"

"Come on, Hastings," called one of the remaining men. "We're freezing out here. Check him off, for God's sake."

The clerk did so and with Traveller leading the way, Murdoch went through archway A.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

TRAVELLER HAD MURDOCH by the sleeve, which was just as well because the men were shoved and pushed as they hurried toward the stairs at the far end of a whitewashed corridor. The new casualties were slower getting through their arch because their names had to be written down, but two or three of them came through their door at the farther end and some of the men in Murdoch's group yelled at them to keep back. They scrambled down a short flight of steps, turned at a sharp angle, and went through yet another door that another palsied elderly man held open for them. He was bleating feebly, "Gentlemen, slow down, please slow down," but nobody paid him any heed.

Murdoch was thrust through into a long, dimly lit room. The air was suffocatingly humid, which felt good after the cold, but there was a strong smell of carbolic that made his eyes sting. At the far end of the room were two huge boilers and facing them a row of bathtubs, partitioned by wooden walls. The tubs were already filled with steaming water. To the right was a set of shelves and next to them stacks of wooden boxes. He was pushed toward the shelves where another nabber in a holland apron was calling out, "Put your clothes in a box. Don't forget your chit. All clothes in the box. Boots on the shelves." The men started to strip off their clothes.

Traveller grabbed two boxes and gave one to Murdoch. Looped around the handle was a strip of leather with a wooden numbered chit. Traveller unfastened it. "Don't lose this. Hang it around your neck. You won't get your clothes

back until the morning. They fumigate them.” He grinned. “We’re cleaner than most good citizens, if you ask me.”

Murdoch took off the fedora and his sealskin overcoat and dropped them into the box. There was a long bench underneath the shelves where several men were sitting and removing their boots. Murdoch could see how easy it would be to switch his for somebody else’s. Most of the boots were shabby and in bad condition, which confirmed his suspicion that the original owner of the good boots Parker had stolen would have raised a ruckus unless it was in his interest not to do so. All of the tramps, including Traveller, had strips of cloth wound around their toes and as they unwrapped them, Murdoch recoiled at the stench. Their clothes might be fumigated but they weren’t washed.

Caught up in the surrounding sense of urgency, Murdoch peeled off his mud-caked jersey and trousers and struggled out of his union suit. Traveller was on one side of him, Alf on the other. Ed seemed to have been shoved to the end of the row and was hopping awkwardly as he tried to get his trousers off without putting his sprained ankle to the ground.

Alf, giggling nonstop, was already naked. His body was soft and hairless but his torso was dotted with bedbug bites. Traveller was wearing a truss and he hung it up on a peg, then tapped Murdoch on the arm. “Come on, take that tub at the end. It’s warmer by the boiler.”

He padded off across the floor, which was some kind of hard granite tile, and headed for the line of bathtubs, half of which were already occupied. Traveller’s body was pallid except for his weathered neck and lower arms. Murdoch was shocked to see a crisscross of stripes across his back. Jack Trevelyan had been flogged at some point in his life. Murdoch hurried after him to the adjoining tub. The water was very hot and he jerked his foot back when it touched the surface. Then he gritted his teeth and climbed in, slowly lowering his rear end into the bath. There was just enough

water to cover his hips and he saw his legs turn red. The carbolic in the water caused his blistered heels to sting painfully.

"You 'ave ten minutes. 'Ere is soap," said a voice at this ear. Another nabber. He had a French accent and his hair and moustache were thick and dark, worn long the way favoured by the Frenchies at the logging camp. He gave Murdoch a small piece of soap and shuffled off to the next tub. He limped badly and Murdoch could see his left foot was twisted inward.

Murdoch rubbed the soap between his palms. It was poor quality, gave as much lather as a stone, and smelled strongly of tar, but he washed as best he could, then sank down into the hot water. At home, he usually bathed once a week on Saturdays, in a small zinc tub in the kitchen. The workhouse bathtub was longer and he could stretch out his legs. It seemed that he had been in the water hardly more than two minutes when he heard a shrill whistle and the Frenchman called, "*Finis. Finis* . Out, if you please. Next group in."

Another small ghostly man appeared around the partition with towels over his arm. He handed one to Murdoch and moved away.

"Come on, mate, get a move on," a wiry little man, very hairy with bandy legs was already standing by the tub and Murdoch was obliged to get out. He wrapped himself in the thin, rough towel and headed back to the bench. From there he had a view of all of the tubs. The first group of occupants was getting out and was quickly replaced. Murdoch saw Ed Parker get into his tub, grimacing with the effort. He'd followed on the most elderly of the tramps, who had smelled gamey from a few paces and Murdoch didn't envy him.

Traveller was drying himself off and he pointed to a stack of nightshirts. "Get one of those."

Frenchie stopped him. "No dress yet, monsieur. The doctor must examine you."

Murdoch looked over at Traveller in dismay. The big man shrugged.

"They'll be most likely checking for small pox. There was a case at one of the country workhouses last week."

The door to the corridor opened and in came a slight, grey-haired man who wore spectacles and stooped slightly. It was Dr. Uzziel Ogden. Murdoch turned to the bench as if he were looking for his boots and got his astonishment under control. He didn't think the doctor would betray him, but he couldn't be certain.

Suddenly Frenchie gave a shout and pointed to the second tub. The one that Parker was in.

"Monsieur Doctor, come quick."

Ogden rushed over and Murdoch saw that Ed was lying with his head under the water.

"Get him out, he's drowned," called the doctor. Frenchie and Ogden grabbed Parker's arms and hauled him into a sitting position. His eyes were closed and his chest wasn't moving.

"He's not breathing. Help us, here," said Ogden and willing hands took Parker by the legs and Parker was hauled out of the tub and laid on the wet floor. It was all Murdoch could do to hold back but he had to. Ogden knelt down beside the prone man, turned his head to one side and began to lift Parker's arms up and down over his head in a pumping action. He did this several times, then with a splutter Ed opened his mouth and water poured out.

Ogden thumped him hard on the chest, causing him to cough violently. After a few moments, he sat up.

"What on earth happened?" asked the doctor.

"I, er, I don't know, sir. I must have slipped and banged my head."

"My God, man, you could have drowned." The doctor spoke as angrily as if Parker had brought this on himself. Which of course he had. "We'd better not take any chances. Let's get him to the infirmary. Can you walk?"

"I believe so, sir. I mean, I have sprained my ankle but that's got nothing to do with drowning."

"Frenchie, help him."

"I'd be grateful if you'd come too, sir," said Parker. "I am feeling a bit dizzy, if truth be told."

Ogden tutted but didn't refuse. "Put a shirt on him," he said to the nabber. "And get his crutches." Once dressed, Ed hopped slowly out of the bathhouse, supported by the two men.

Murdoch exhaled deeply in relief. "Hey, I'm getting cold, can't we get out of here?"

"I don't know, the doctor ..." said the elderly attendant who'd let them in.

There was a loud knocking on the other door and somebody shouted, "Hurry up." The nabber jumped. "Get your nightshirts then."

Murdoch slipped his over his head. It was a heavy linen and fell to his feet, but it didn't smell too clean, as if the laundry was two tramps ago.

"Put on your boots and come this way," said the nabber, and he opened the door Parker and the doctor had taken. The casuals followed him down a short, cold corridor, to yet another door, which the attendant unlocked. Murdoch felt as if he were in a jail. This door opened into a long, high-ceilinged room filled with narrow beds, each spaced about four feet from the other. Between each bed was a commode bucket. The floor was covered with a worn oilcloth. Two large clocks hung at each end of the whitewashed room. The narrow, high windows were curtainless. Like the bathhouse, the dormitory was pungent with sulphur and carbolic.

Traveller beckoned to Murdoch and led the way to the centre of the long aisle where a large woodstove blocked the way. Alf trailed behind them and Bettles and Ward were close at his heels.

"It gets cold in here during the night," said Traveller. "Better to have a bed near the stove."

He pulled back the thin grey blanket on one of the beds and got under the cover. There were no sheets or cases for the pillows. The other men were also starting to get into bed, even the young farm labourer. Murdoch sat on the bed next to the tramp's. "My God, Traveller, it's only six o'clock."

"They'll wake us up at six in the morning and like the man told you, you probably won't get much sleep. There ain't anything else to do anyway except get some kip. Goodnight to you."

He pulled up the blanket so that it completely covered his face.

The next batch of men was arriving now and they began to choose their beds. Alf had taken the one beside Murdoch, but he was sitting up, propped against the wall, watching, greeting some of the newcomers with his facile smile. Ned Bettles and his pal Kearney had taken the beds across the narrow aisle from Murdoch and they were lying on top of their blankets.

"Oi, Williams, did you bring any baccy in with you?"

The old nabber who had let them in heard that. "I will remind you men that no smoking or drinking is allowed."

"We know that, old man, no need to shake your fetters. But I need to make my water."

"You must use the commodes provided for that purpose," fussed the man.

Bettles swung his legs off the bed and lifted the lid of the pail beside the bed.

"Hey. Somebody forgot to empty it," he scowled.

The nabber scuttled over to inspect. Murdoch could see that the pail was indeed almost full.

"Nothing we can do about that now. You'll have to use somebody else's if you have to."

He turned to Murdoch, who had stretched out his legs. "You are not allowed to put your boots on the beds."

Murdoch knew the poor old man was only doing his job, but he was irritatingly fussy.

“What other rules am I supposed to know?”

“No spitting is allowed and you must use the commode provided.”

“So I understand.”

The old man didn't react to his sarcasm, but he said earnestly, “Lights will be extinguished at nine o'clock. After that time, there is to be no talking. Silence must be kept.”

He hurried off to scold a young newcomer who had got onto one of the beds with his boots on.

Murdoch removed his own and stowed them underneath his bed. The nightshirt was itchy and he felt peculiar to be going to bed at this time of night. Some of the men were talking to each other, but they were the new casuals. The regular tramps didn't talk, not even Bettles and his companion. They got in the beds and like Traveller immediately got underneath the blankets.

Murdoch leaned back and looked up at the dark windows. His stomach rumbled and he realized he was very hungry. It was going to be a long night.

Chapter Thirty

THERE WAS NOWHERE ELSE to sit except on the narrow, hard bed and the ward wasn't that warm so after a little while, Murdoch followed Traveller's example and got under the blanket. Candles were burning in the wall sconces but they were inferior wax and threw off little light. He shifted, trying to make himself comfortable. He would have liked his pipe; he would have liked one of Katie's hot stews, but most of all he wished he had something to read. There was nothing to do except go to sleep and it was only a quarter past six.

"You're looking like you've lost your best friend." Traveller had opened his eyes and was grinning at Murdoch. "Finding the life a little quiet, are you?"

"Like the grave. I'm tempted to rouse all the men and start up some sea shanties. That'd liven things up."

"You'd get thrown out in no time. The bosses don't like rowdy behaviour. You might get away with singing a few hymns, but you'll have a hard time finding many in this bunch who know the words. Besides, hymns aren't popular with this lot of unrepentant sinners. They've had them stuffed down their gobs too many times and had to act grateful ... Just a minute, this'll cheer you up." He brought his hand from underneath the blanket and keeping whatever it was hidden in his fist, he handed something to Murdoch. "Be careful. There's always somebody ready to do a Judas for an extra bowl of soup." He pressed a small vial into Murdoch's palm, then rolled onto his back and closed his eyes. "Save some for me," he muttered.

Murdoch glanced around him. As far as he could tell in the poor light, nobody was watching him. He waited a few

minutes, surreptitiously unscrewed the top of the vial, then slid down the bed and pulled the blanket over his head. Carefully, he took a couple of sips from the bottle and almost choked as a burning liquid hit his throat. He struggled to suppress his coughing and waited while the fire in his empty belly raged. Still under cover of the blankets, he replaced the top of the bottle. *Save some for me*, indeed. One sip would last him a week.

He felt a tap on his shoulder and pulled the blanket down to nose level. Traveller was leaning across the gap between the beds.

"You all right?"

"What the hell was that?"

The tramp chuckled. "It's homemade. I got it from a toby in the country. He calls it witch's milk. Powerful, ain't it?"

The burning in his gut was subsiding a little now and Murdoch was feeling a bit light-headed.

"If you've had enough, give it back to me. Don't let it be seen," said Traveller.

Murdoch handed over the little bottle. "How did you smuggle it in here?"

"Easy. My truss comes in handy."

Murdoch felt a spasm of uneasiness at the memory of how warm the vial had been. Traveller disappeared underneath his blanket and Murdoch heard a smothered cough. A few minutes later, the tramp's head reappeared, his face even redder than before.

"That'll make you forget your troubles in no time."

Murdoch burst out laughing. "It'll make you forget more than your troubles if you drink too much of it. What is it?"

"It's a secret formula, but I think my chum makes it from potatoes."

Alf giggled from the next bed. He hadn't been asleep after all. "Can I have some?"

"No, you cannot," said Traveller. "We drank it all." He pushed down the blanket and sat up. "I'm wide awake now.

That's the sinister side of that drink. It don't put you to sleep right away."

The simpleton bounced on his bed like a child. "Will you tell us a story, Mr. Traveller? Mr. Williams hasn't heard your yarns before."

Murdoch seized the opportunity the boy was giving him. "Great idea, I'd like that, as I'm awake now myself."

"What story do you want, Alf?" Traveller's voice was indulgent. Even in the dim light of the candle, Murdoch could see the tramp's eyes were glistening. He must have taken a really good slug of the witch's milk.

"Tell him how you got your stripes. That's a good one."

Murdoch laughed. "I have to admit I was curious about them myself. They look kind of severe."

"Thirty-five lashes. Fifteen the first time, twenty the second, and I got them while I was detained at Her Majesty's pleasure. Now I suppose you want to know what I was doing in the penitentiary?"

"If you want to tell me."

"Why wouldn't I? I ain't ashamed. Not everybody who goes to jail is a criminal, you know."

Not wanting to stop him, Murdoch nodded sympathetically.

Traveller settled himself more comfortably and laced his fingers across his chest. "I was born and bred in Newfoundland, but I left when I was fourteen. No future there that I could see. My family was most wiped out by the influenza so there was nobody to weep for me. I signed up on a whaler. Got to see a lot of the world. I was a hot head, drank too much even for a sailor, but I was doing well on the ship. You can make a lot of money on just one voyage if you're lucky. But then, like now, there's always some cove who wants to pull down a big healthy lad and in back then, it was the first mate, a weasel fart-catcher of a bastard who took a scunner to me from the moment I put my foot on the deck. Like I said, I was always a hot head and I took

exception to the sneers and the duties I'd pull, which were always the coldest and the messiest. According to him, they was never done right so I was always up on some charge or other and me pay docked. He was always ready to hand me a stotter to the head if he thought I looked at him the wrong way. One night, he went too far and shoved me headfirst into a bucket of fish guts. I took exception and turned around and slugged him."

"Hooray," exclaimed Alf in delight and he boxed the air with his fists.

Traveller continued to stare up at the ceiling. "So the cove, he fell down, cracked his ugly head on the mast. He's a drivelling idiot for the rest of his life. I was charged and sent down, but the captain gave me a good testimonial so I only got three years and a bit of triangulation. Fifteen stripes. I wouldn't have got that except I wouldn't eat humble pie. Why should I? I was defending myself."

He paused and Murdoch saw that even after so many years, he was still bitter about his treatment.

"Well, like I said, I've bin given thirty-five all told. Those first ones for standing up for myself, the other twenty for the same reason. Near the end of my sentence, I took on a guard who could have been the kith and kin of the first mate. He wanted to stick my head in the piss bucket. I refused and another three years was added on to my sentence for that little tap."

Alf laughed in delight. "Some little tap. I know your little taps, Traveller."

The tramp frowned. "Be quiet, Alf. Our friend here will get the impression I'm a violent man, which I ain't."

Trevelyan was presenting himself as a wronged man and Murdoch wondered how true that was.

"Like I said, Mr. Williams, I was a hot head in those days, but I'm as meek as a lamb now. Fighting ain't worth the trouble it brings."

"But you'd do it again, surely? You couldn't stand for that kind of treatment."

"That's the truth, I couldn't, but I have a cooler head now and I'm more canny about seeing trouble coming. The tobies all know I won't put up with shite and they keep their distance."

"They're ascaired of him," chirped Alf.

"Anything else you want to know, son?" Traveller asked Murdoch.

"How'd you end up a casual?"

"Same way you have, I don't wonder. I'd lost my appetite for the sea when I came out of the peg, but I couldn't get a job that was steady. I never was much good about gaffers, but when I came out the aversion was even stronger and I couldn't abide any man who always had to prove he was boss. If they paid fair and treated me decent, I'd work for them and willingly, but that kind of cove was hard to find. To most of them I was as low as an un-baptized savage. They acted surprised sometimes that I could even understand English. Given that I also like to keep on the move, that I get stir crazy now if I stay in one place too long, you have what you see here, a wayfarer, as they like to call us."

"Hooray," said Alf again. He'd spoken too loud and Bettles, who was in the bed opposite, growled out a curse. The dormitory was quieter now, most of the men seemed to be resigned to going to sleep.

"It must be a hard life," Murdoch said softly.

"Not if you know the ropes, it ain't so bad." Traveller winked at him. "You ain't said much about yourself though."

"Not much to tell." Murdoch braced himself for the questions he expected to come at him, but the tramp suddenly yawned.

"Why don't we save it till the morning? I'm in need of my kip, now while I can. Alf, you lie down and close your eyes, do you hear me?"

“Yes, Mr. Traveller.” The boy immediately slid under his blanket. “Good night, Mr. Williams.”

“Good night, Alf. Good night, Traveller.”

The tramp rolled over onto his side and grunted a response. Murdoch lay back. He was feeling ravenous. He sighed and rolled over onto his stomach to flatten the emptiness. The sour smell from his pillow was nauseating, but there wasn't anything he could do about it.

Murdoch didn't know what time it was because the room was too dark to see the clock, but he felt that he hadn't slept long. He hadn't been able to fall asleep after Traveller's story and was still awake when the old nabber had come in to blowout the candles at nine o'clock. After that, he'd tossed and turned for what seemed like more than an hour. Silence must be observed, the attendant had said, but the dormitory was noisy. Men snoring, talking in their sleep, getting up to make copious water in the bucket. One man had the deep racking cough of the consumptive that he knew all too well from hearing Arthur Kitchen's for the past four years. Somebody at the end of the row had a nightmare and had started crying out. Two or three men closer to him shouted curses at the fellow, whoever he was. Alf giggled nervously even in his sleep.

Traveller was right about the room getting cold. The stove was not stoked up and drafts poured through the gaps around the window frames. One blanket was not enough and Murdoch wished he had his own warm quilt. Added to all that, the straw mattress was prickly and hard. Was this all worth it? he wondered. So far he hadn't come across any new evidence. Ed's departure for the infirmary had saved Murdoch's bacon, but it also meant Ed hadn't identified his own boots. The description Mrs. Bright had given of a tramp walking across the Gardens could fit anyone of a dozen men here, as could that of the man Mr. Swanzey had

encountered in the greenhouse. He tried to cheer himself up with the hope that his suspect was here, one of the handful of men who were repeaters.

Murdoch sensed rather than heard somebody beside the bed. He opened his eyes, saw a silhouette of a man bending toward him. He had something in his raised hand. With one swift movement, Murdoch rolled onto the floor, dropping into a crouch, and straining to see in the dark. The figure backed away and he heard a familiar giggle.

"Alf, what the hell are you doing?"

Murdoch tried to keep his voice low but the youth had startled him. Anger followed.

"You said you was hungry," whispered Alf. "So I was going to surprise you and put a piece of bread under your pillow." He showed a crust to Murdoch. "I smuggled it in my boot, but I wrapped it up good in some newspaper."

Murdoch got to his feet. "That was kind of you, but I'll wait until morning. Why don't you go back to bed."

"Yes, why don't we?" growled a voice from the bed across from them. Murdoch heard the scratch of a match and a light flared, illuminating Bettles's face. There was a scone directly behind his bed and he reached up and lit the candle.

"What the hell's going on?" Kearney stirred in the adjacent bed and also sat up.

"Little Alf was having a tryst with his sweetheart."

"He was giving me a piece of bread," said Murdoch.

"My, touchy, aren't we?" Bettles turned to Kearney. "What do you think, Sean? Have we uncovered a couple of nancy boys?"

Kearney swung his legs over the side of his bed. Bettles did the same. The simpleton knew exactly what was in store for him. He dropped to the floor and scuttled underneath his bed, whimpering like a frightened dog.

Somehow, Bettles had managed to smuggle one of the bathhouse towels into the dormitory. He'd covered his pillow

with it and now he pulled the towel away and began to twist it into a rope.

"Perhaps these two need a bit of a lesson, Sean."

Kearney had a towel as well and he picked it up and started to twist it. "I'd say that's a good and necessary thing to do."

Both men stepped across the aisle, blocking any chance Murdoch might have to get away from the wall. He was trapped between Traveller's bed and his own, both of which had heavy metal frames bolted to the floor. He had nothing to defend himself with except the thin pillow and he grabbed this and held it in front of himself.

Bettles grinned. "Fat lot of good that's going to do you, Mr. Nancy Boy. This is the casual ward, or did you forget? I'll split that thing in two with one swing."

The moment hung in the balance, Murdoch on his feet, ready for the attack, the two men opposite him, just as ready to move in on him. Nobody had raised his voice and the rest of the ward appeared to be fast asleep.

As far as Murdoch knew, that included Traveller, but suddenly, with as quick and easy a movement as Kearney had made, he sat up and pushed away the blanket.

"Put it down, Bettles, that'd be despoiling of public property and we can't have that, can we?" His bare feet dangled over the edge of his bed. He was no longer a young man, but at that moment, nobody would have doubted his ability to make good his command. In his hand, a blade gleamed dully in the light of the candle. It was a razor.

Bettles grimaced. "I ain't got no truck with you, Traveller. This fellow's a Miss Molly."

"No he ain't."

"Alfie here was a going to climb in bed with him."

"No he weren't. The lad's as simple as a puppy dog. Now, I suggest we all calm down and get some kip. Before you know it, we'll be called."

Traveller got off the bed with such speed that both Bettles and Kearney jumped back.

"Suit yourself," said Bettles. "He's in the bed next to *you* , not me."

If Traveller hadn't been blocking the way, Murdoch would have swung a punch at the man and hang the consequences, but neither Bettles nor Kearney were within reach. They slowly eased back to their own beds, allowing the towels to untwist.

"Maybe we'd better leave the candle lit," said Traveller. "Just so we know there won't be anybody wandering around where they shouldn't. And I mean anybody."

Alf giggled and stuck his head out from under the bed.

"You can come out now," said Traveller. "Get into your own bed and don't stir till sun-up even if the whole ward is starving. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, Mr. Traveller."

Alf scrambled into bed and Traveller sat back down.

"Thank you," said Murdoch.

Murdoch looked over at Bettles and Kearney, who were stretched out on their beds, as ready and alert as wolves. Had they guessed he was a police officer and used Alf as an excuse to trounce him?

"Don't worry about them two," said Traveller. "I've had all the sleep I want. You can get some more kip and I'll make sure our friends don't move."

"No, I'll do it. I'm wide awake myself. What have we got, another two hours until the call? I'll stay up."

It was true what he said. He was hardly going to fall asleep when the man in the next bed possessed a vicious-looking open razor that he clearly would have no hesitation in using and two husky thugs across from him wanted to see blood.

Traveller shrugged. "Suit yourself. Wake me if you need to. Don't even let those two take a piss." He lay down and

pulled his blanket up around his shoulders. “Don’t let that fool boy bring me his mucky sandwich either.”

Chapter Thirty-One

THOMAS HICKS COULD SEE HIS WIFE , Emily, sitting across from him at the table. He felt terribly ill and knew he'd vomited down his nightshirt. He couldn't catch his breath no matter how hard he tried and his head was throbbing so violently he was afraid his skin would split apart at the temples. He tried to cry out for help, but Emily didn't seem to notice. She was drinking her tea in that dainty precise way he remembered so well. He knew that his bladder and bowels had voided and he was ashamed even in front of her. He wanted to move, to stand up and get away from the pain in his chest, but he couldn't .

She put down her cup and saucer and folded her hands neatly in her lap .

"Have you come for me at last, dearest?" he managed to ask her .

"Yes, Tom, I have, "she said and her smile was so sweet, his eyes filled with tears and he wept .

"Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care." Murdoch had studied *Macbeth* in the fifth standard. Brother Julian, who was stupefyingly dull, had taught the class and he and his pupils had never progressed beyond the thorny hedge of the unfamiliar language. Brother Julian seemed to find Shakespeare as foreign and uninteresting as they did. However, just once, the play had come alive when quite out of the blue, the Brother said that Shakespeare had understood, even in that long ago time, how disease of the soul can affect sleep. "Macbeth hath murdered sleep,"

proclaimed the Brother, his voice unusually resonant. "His guilty conscience prevents him from sleeping."

Murdoch had suffered from insomnia as long as he could remember, and Brother Julian's remark had thrown him into a dark period as he tried to discover if his own soul was indeed sick and, if so, how he could heal it. Fortunately for him, there was a priest, Father Malone, who was attached to the school, had listened to the young boy's painful confessions, reassured him, and absolved him. But the insomnia never went away and many a night Murdoch found himself lying awake, waiting for dawn to come when he could fall asleep.

He thumped at the scrawny pillow as he tried to get more comfortable. Staying awake this time was a choice, which made matters a little easier, but he still felt the familiar twist of utter loneliness in his guts. He was sharing a room with about sixty other men, but he felt alone, the perpetual outsider. What would they do if they knew he was spying on them? Did he have copper written all over him? He hoped not. He thought his own cover story was plausible and they'd seemed to accept it. He could just make out the shape of Bettles and Kearney across the aisle. They were both lying still and their sleep seemed genuine. Traveller was on his back, snoring softly, his breathing deep. Murdoch owed him a debt now for his intervention. From the beginning, he had been most friendly. Was he like that with every newcomer or was he currying favour? Did *he* suspect the truth?

Murdoch could hear Alf, in the next bed, snuffling and whimpering periodically in his sleep like the puppy Traveller had called him. Murdoch let his thoughts drift. He wondered if anybody was awake at home. Katie might be tending to the twins. Perhaps Amy had got up again and was helping her. She was so good with the babies. Murdoch grinned to himself. She wasn't like any teacher he'd known. The nuns at his school were strict, but in the early years he was a

studious and obedient boy and he'd liked school and done well. It was later, when his Aunt Weldon had sent him to study with the Christian Brothers, that school descended into unremitting misery. Murdoch chafed at the strict and unjust rules, the capricious dishing out of punishments, but above all, he loathed what he perceived as the superstitious ignorance of the Brothers. Most of his teachers seemed poorly educated, hardly one step ahead of their pupils. He began to challenge them, to speak back, and almost every day he was caned for some infraction, supposed rudeness, or simply because that day the Brother felt like beating his pupils. The worst, the man who became his hated enemy was Brother Edmund, a big-boned, hard-faced man who before he'd found his calling had worked for a horse breeder somewhere in Alberta. This Brother boasted that there wasn't a horse or a boy he couldn't break. Murdoch had desperately wanted to prove him wrong, but the contest was impossibly unequal. By the end of his second year, Murdoch knew he had only three choices. He could leave the school without an education of any kind, endure a brutality usually reserved for hardened criminals, or stop questioning everything, learn whatever he could and go silent. He chose the last option and Brother Edmund crowed.

Murdoch's jaw had clenched at the memory. Unlike Traveller, his body no longer carried the scars of the floggings the Christian brother had administered with such undisguised delight, but his soul did. He'd heard a few years ago that Brother Edmund had died from diphtheria and Murdoch's first reaction was one of regret that he'd never gone back to the school, found the man and given him the thrashing he deserved.

Amy Slade's pupils would never carry that kind of memory, quite the opposite.

He hadn't told her what he was up to, but Charlie would have explained why he wasn't at home. She'd be eager to hear his tales when he returned, he knew that. He was lucky

to have her and Seymour, and he'd come to rely on their company the way he had on the Kitchens. As long as he'd been living with the Kitchens, he'd had some feeling of family and he dearly hoped Arthur would recover. Murdoch would like to have his own family, he knew that. He and Liza had talked about having children, had even picked out names.

Murdoch sighed. The possibility of finding a wife seemed remote now that Enid had left him. Maybe he should go back to professor Otranto's dance studio. There were some very attractive young women there, but he didn't feel comfortable dancing with them, treading on toes, his hands sweating on the silk of their dresses. He was out of practice and he'd be sure to make a bollocks of the waltzes.

If he were at home in his own room, he would have got out of bed at this point, pushed back the rug, and done a few reverse turns. If he did that now, they'd probably send for the doctor and he'd get committed.

Thank goodness Dr. Ogden had been drawn away by Parker. Clever Ed. All that trickery paying off.

Somebody at the far end of the ward got up to use the commode. He seemed to be ill and groaned and broke wind alternately until he voided. Murdoch hoped he wouldn't forget to empty that bucket.

The nightshirt was itchy. He scratched his chest remembering the bedbug bites on the men going into the bath. Somewhere in the city, people were sleeping in soft feather beds with linen sheets that were washed regularly. They were warm and fed. Of all the men in this room, how many deserved this wretched fate? Less than one-third in his estimation. The others, through the misfortune of injury or ill health, were sentenced like convicts to a wandering life with no home or family and little prospect of getting out of the mire. The more time a man spent in the casual wards, the less chance he stood of getting back to a respectable job. Employers were suspicious of the wayfarers and as he'd

already seen, they were the first to be suspected of a crime if one occurred in their vicinity.

Was it one of these men who had attacked Charles Howard so viciously? In his mind, both Bettles and Kearney were capable of it. Bettles had shrugged off his bruised face and the minister didn't seem to have marks on his knuckles, but he could have struck out with his elbow, an object in his hand, anything really. Which of them had been wearing Howard's boots before Parker took them?

Murdoch sighed and pulled the threadbare cover up to his chin. He'd better start acting more like a detective and less like a tramp if he was going to find out.

Josie groaned and tried to sit up, but the room swam nauseatingly in front of her eyes and she dropped back to the pillow. She reached over to touch her mother, who was lying beside her .

"Ma, can you get me some water, I'm desperate thirsty." She thought she'd said this, but she wasn't sure. Her head ached and she felt as if the air was so heavy it sat on her chest making it hard to breathe .

"Ma," she said again and she turned her head. A cold, clammy fog from the lake had crept into the room and she was finding it hard to see anything clearly. She so wanted to go back to sleep, but she knew she shouldn't. Through the deepening mist, she tried to see her mother's face .

"Ma, get up. It must be late."

Esther stirred and Josie saw her struggle to get out of the bed. She knew she was trying to get to Wilf .

She always puts him first, she thought irritably. Can't she see I'm dying?

Chapter Thirty-Two

THE DOOR OPENED and the old nabber, Hastings, came in carrying a handbell, which he began to shake vigorously.

"Wake up, men. Wake up. It's six o'clock. Wake up."

The men stirred in a movement that rolled down the ward like a feather bed being shaken by an energetic servant. Some of the men sat up quickly, others groaned and rolled over, but nobody stayed asleep. Traveller sat up and got out of bed at once.

"Nothing else happened, I presume?" he asked Murdoch.

"We were quiet as the grave. I'd better pinch myself to know I'm alive."

Traveller chuckled. "Well my stomach and my bladder are telling me I'm still quick. Do you have to use the bucket?"

"I do indeed."

"Use it now then. The last one has to empty it."

Murdoch took his advice.

He hardly finished when he felt a tug on his sleeve. Alf was standing behind him.

"Can I come in with you?" he asked and nodded nervously in the direction of Bettles and Kearney.

"Of course."

"Line up in front of the door," the nabber called.

"Come on," said Traveller. "It's best to be at the front of the line for the dining room."

Murdoch and Alf followed him, shoving through the other men, and got into the first group already waiting at the door.

"You five men at the back, you bring down the buckets," called the nabber before leading the way down to the long hall where they'd left their clothes. Murdoch thought they

must have looked a proper sight, sixty men of all ages and sizes, shuffling along in their nightshirts and boots. It was cold in the corridor and he was glad of the warmth of the bodies pressing around him. Alf hung on to Murdoch's shirt as if he were a child with his father. They halted at the door past the bathhouse.

The nabber hopped on a small stool by the door and rang his bell.

"Find your clothes and get dressed quickly. Put your nightshirts in the bin provided. Don't forget to hand over your tabs. When you're ready, wait in front of the doors at the far end."

"Are we in the army?" Murdoch asked Traveller.

"More like jail," he replied.

As they stepped over the threshold, an overpowering rotten egg smell hit Murdoch's nose.

"Phew, what's that?"

"It's the burning sulphur they use to fumigate our clothes. Stinks, doesn't it?"

Hunger and cold made all of them move speedily and within ten minutes they had lined up facing the opposite doors. Murdoch hadn't enjoyed getting into his dirty clothes but at least he was warmer. All the men were dressed for the outdoors, clothes piled on top of clothes when they had them. Murdoch was struck by the hats the men were wearing: battered fedoras, plaid caps, fur forage hats, anything to keep their heads warm.

The nabber shoved his way through the crowd and jumped onto yet another stool.

"For those of you who haven't been here before, I will tell you that you will be served two slices of bread and one bowl of skilly. One mug of tea. Don't moan and complain because you won't get any more than that. It's not our fault. That's all the council allows us."

"I could eat that four times over," Murdoch whispered to Traveller.

“Not here you won’t unless somebody’s sick and can’t eat, and who gets his food is a matter of luck.”

Hastings opened the door, leading the way back upstairs.

Because of Traveller, their little trio was among the first to spill into the room. The dining room was long and narrow with several wooden tables and benches in rows down the centre. Traveller took them directly to a long serving table where four men, old and withered, were standing ready to serve them. Two of them dished out the oatmeal, the third man had a bin of slices of unbuttered bread, and the fourth was filling mugs from an urn with a liquid so pale it was hard to believe it was tea.

Murdoch collected his bowl of skilly, his two slices of bread, and a mug of tea. Following Traveller, he went to one of the tables and slid into the bench, Alf close beside him.

His stomach was growling painfully and he spooned up some of the oatmeal as fast as he could. It was watery, lukewarm, and tasteless.

“Put some salt in it, it’ll taste better,” said Traveller. There were metal shakers spotted along the table and Traveller smothered his oatmeal. Nobody spoke while they consumed the unappetizing meal. Murdoch was ravenous, but even so, it was hard to enjoy dry bread that was on the verge of being stale. He followed Traveller’s advice with the bread too and dipped it in his mug of tea. Both Alf and Traveller finished before he did and he saw them scouting the table to see if anybody was dawdling over the oatmeal and who might be persuaded to give it up. There wasn’t anybody, even though Murdoch could see several of the out-of-work labourers were pulling faces and muttering to each other.

Bettles and Kearney had taken seats at the end of their table and Murdoch glanced over at them casually and without pausing in his gulping down the porridge, Bettles managed to flick him the thumb.

Traveller, who didn’t seem to miss anything, jerked his head in a warning.

"Don't let him get to you."

"He's riding me."

"Course he is but you're the winner if you keep your temper. Besides, t'ain't nothing to do with you, son. That son of a bitch was just hoping to best me, is the truth. You're the bait."

"Why do you say that?"

Traveller didn't answer immediately, wiping the inside of the mug with his last piece of bread.

"Traveller's the king," giggled Alf. "They's always going for the king."

Trevelyan grinned. "You ain't been going around the circuit like we have, Mr. Williams. Us regular tramps become like a court, you might say. We knows each other and we knows our place. I ain't the oldest, Jesse over there is the oldest, but I'm the strongest and I know the ropes. Sooner or later one of the bucks wants to challenge my position. It's happened to me since I was a nipper. I was born big and stayed big. And there's always some cull wants to best me so he can be king." His keen eyes met Murdoch's. "They're too stupid to realize that they're going to be king of a court filled with courtiers who wear rags and are society's castouts."

"Let them have it, then."

"If it were a matter of stepping aside so they could have first go for the pig's food they serve us, I'd do it willingly, but it ain't that simple. Some of these fellows like Bettles won't be satisfied till they see blood. It's what you might call primitive. Us men are the same as the wild creatures. We've got to prove who's got the biggest cock, excuse my language. So as long as I've got the strength, I've got to fight them."

"And when you don't have the strength?"

"Then there'll be a new king, won't there?"

Murdoch couldn't tell how old Traveller was. Certainly close to middle age. He was big and looked strong, but more

than that he had a formidable presence.

Jesse, the old tramp who was sitting next to Traveller, apparently lost in his own world, suddenly said, "Here, Jack. I can't stand this tea. Do you want the last of it yourself?"

He shoved his mug toward Traveller.

"Thank you kindly. Even this cat's piss is better than none at all, though I'd give my right fingers for a good hot, strong cup of char with heaps of sugar."

He gulped down the tea, wiped his mouth with his sleeve.

Murdoch would liked to have gone on talking to him, but Hastings appeared again with his bell.

"Listen up, all of you. This meal is being served to you courtesy of the taxpayers of this city. In return you are expected to work. You will follow me to the lumberyard, where you cut and split wood. Those who are physically capable of this work must do it or you will forfeit your dinner. If you are incapable you will be excused and if you can prove that you have prospects of getting work if you leave this morning, you must say so. I will remind you, however, that we are experienced here in the ways of tramps so don't think you can pull the wool over our eyes. Who here is going for a position this morning?"

Of all sixty men, a half dozen raised their hands.

"You can leave then, but report to the manager in the lumberyard first. Don't try any gammon, we'll know."

Murdoch nudged Traveller. "Why aren't more of the men trying to find proper work?"

"'Cos there ain't any to be found. It's easier to stay here and chop wood than trudge around the city and get turned down every time you try for something. At least you're guaranteed a bowl of soup for dinner."

The nabber saw them talking and he scowled. "Quiet, you two. I haven't finished. Is there anybody here who ain't going to pay for their keep?"

Four men raised their hands.

"You've got to move on then."

“That’s what I was planning to do,” growled one grizzled tramp. He must have gone through the bathhouse, but his clothes were so wretched and dirty, his skin so weatherbeaten, he seemed filthy. The other three men were similar and Murdoch gathered they were at the end of their permitted three days and preferred to take their chances on getting dinner and leave the workhouse. He hoped none of them was the one he was looking for and he tried to memorize what they looked like.

“Are you going to work?” he asked Traveller.

“I am, I’ve got one more day here.”

“What about your hernia? Will it give you trouble?”

Jack winked. “I never know when that damn thing is going to act up. Sometimes I can’t do anything, sometimes I can. Today, I’m all right.”

The nabber rang his bell again. He must enjoy doing that, thought Murdoch.

“The rest of you follow me. Orderly and quiet now.”

The men at the table began to move out from the benches.

“Hang back,” Traveller muttered. “It’s better to be with the last group in the lumberyard. They might not have enough piles for everybody.”

They followed the nabber out of the dining room and back down the stairs. He pushed open a heavy door.

“Don’t think you can get away with shirking because you can’t. Remember, you can still be turned out.”

As he walked out to the lumberyard, Murdoch entertained himself with the fantasy of stuffing the old codger’s head into his own bell.

Chapter Thirty-Three

A MAN IN A BLACK OVERCOAT and fedora was waiting for them in the yard. He was short and stout, with grey side whiskers and a walrus moustache. A gold pincenez, with a gold chain, was perched on his stubby nose. Everything about him said *minister*, especially his nervous smile as he watched the tramps coming through the door. Murdoch saw Parker, hopping on his crutches, come out from the infirmary side. He didn't look any the worse for wear, rather the opposite, to Murdoch's jaundiced eye. Ed looked rested, far better than he himself felt. There were three nabbers, also waiting, one of them the boss, Gowan, from the day before.

The tramp major blew on his mittened hands against the cold. "All right then. The sooner you start working, the sooner you'll get warm. Over here is the Reverend Elmore Harris, who in case you should want to look him up, is the pastor of Walmer Road Baptist Church. He's the manager for today and he's here to help me sort out the wheat from the chaff or, to translate for you heathens, the liars from the truth-tellers."

One of the attendants handed him a list, which he stared at.

"The following men will step forward, Barnes, Carson, Keats, and Stepney. I understand you're claiming to be unfit to work. Let me see you with my own eyes."

The old man who'd given Traveller his tea stepped forward. The others were also elderly and one had the racking cough of the consumptive, currently aggravated by the cold air.

Gowan inspected them as if they were cattle he was buying. "What do you think, pastor?"

"I'd say they are definitely excused. I think the fellow on the end should go over to the infirmary and see if he can get some cough medicine."

"That's Stepney. Go on then and count yourself lucky. The other three of you can carry the wood when it's split and stack it in the carts over there. That's not too hard. Now who has refused to work? Step forward where I can see you and state your name."

The four men who had put up their hands in the dining room did as he said and Gowan made an obvious point of writing down their names.

"Off you go, then. I know who you are so don't expect to come back here and freeload off decent citizens. And if you bother anybody for money, you will be charged with vagrancy and thrown in jail."

Traveller snorted at that and muttered to Murdoch, "Sometimes jail is better than being in here. You get more to eat."

Gowan tossed his record book to the nearby nabber.

"Now then, some of you know what to do, some of you don't, so I'll explain. All of those logs over there, kindly donated by Elias Rogers, have got to be sawed into four pieces. Those blocks then have to be chopped and split. That's not too complicated for any of you, is it?"

The nabbers began tagging various men and directing them to the trestles. All of the logs had been previously cut to length, and in spite of the circumstances and the cold, and the perpetual itching of his jersey, Murdoch felt a surge of pleasure at the sweet raw wood smell. He inhaled as if it were a perfume, aware of the quizzical glance from Traveller.

A nabber touched his arm. "You can chop."

Traveller, Alf, Bettles, and Kearney had also been designated as choppers and they stood together waiting

until the first block of wood was sawn off. Murdoch seized his chance and strolled over to Parker, who had been given the job of counting the number of blocks. He was perched on a spare trestle, a pad and pencil in his hand.

"Feeling better, are you?" Murdoch asked.

"Thank you, sir. I am that."

Murdoch moved a little closer and turned so that he was standing beside Parker and appeared to be casually looking over the tramps getting to work. "Do you see your boots?"

Ed focused on his pad. "It's hard to tell. They weren't special, just old black boots. There are four coves I've seen who could be wearing them."

"Point them out."

"The simpleton who was by you in the queue for one, and the man in the yellow muffler."

"There's two with yellow mufflers, which is it?"

"The younger one with the bruise on his mug. Also, the cove in the plaid cap who was beside you."

"Who else?"

Before Ed could answer, Gowan called over to them.

"Oi, you. Williams. What do you think you're doing? This isn't a church club. Get busy or I'll put you on notice as a shirker."

"Quick, who else?"

"Maybe the old guy who just got sent off to the infirmary."

"Did you get a look at the ones who left?"

Ed shook his head. "No, sorry."

"I'll come back," Murdoch muttered to Ed. "Keep looking."

He went back to where Traveller and the others were starting to stack their blocks ready for chopping.

"How's the lad doing?" Traveller asked Murdoch.

"He seems all right."

"Did you know him from before then?"

"No, I was just concerned. He could have drowned."

Traveller grinned. "Mebbe. But everybody knows if you can get a night in the infirmary you get some grub and a

better breakfast." He jerked his head in the direction of the manager. "Gowan's watching you. He's a mean son of a bitch. You'd better get busy."

Murdoch removed his hat and his sealskin coat and placed them on the ground out of the way. The sun was sparkling on the patches of snow and the sky was a brilliant blue. The price for this brightness was icy temperatures and his breath was like smoke in front of him, the cold air penetrating through even his thick jersey.

The choppers were picking up axes that were lined up against the fence. Murdoch went to get his. He tested the blades on a couple. None were very sharp, but one of them was balanced well enough so he chose it and returned to his spot.

One of the men had finished sawing his log. He had the wide shoulders and smooth movements of a logger and his logs were appearing fast.

"Where was your crib?" Murdoch asked him as he picked up two of the blocks.

"Huntsville. Know it?"

"Sure do. I was a chopper there myself about twelve years ago."

Traveller heard him.

"I thought you said you was just now from a camp and that you'd hurt your back."

"That's right. It wasn't Huntsville, though."

He stood one of the blocks on top of the other and took a swing at it, feeling the satisfaction of seeing the wood divide cleanly into two pieces.

"Your back seems fine now," said Traveller.

"Bit sore, but it'll do." And he stacked another piece of wood. Alf was next to him making wild and futile stabs at chopping his block of wood. Murdoch stopped what he was doing.

"Here, Alf. Let me show you. Best to put one piece of wood on top of the other. It's easier on your back that way. Now

hold your axe nice and loose, don't clutch it like that. It's important to aim for the crack in the wood. See that one there. Stand with your legs apart and bend at the knees as you come down. Here, like this."

He showed him and split the wood cleanly. Alf laughed as if he had shown him a magician's trick.

Bettles and Kearney had been leisurely collecting their blocks and Bettles called over to them.

"You're in a good humour this morning, Alf. You must have slept well. Lots of lovely dreams, I suspect, from the noises you were making."

Alf nodded uneasily. Murdoch was standing close to Traveller and he saw the tension in the tramp's body.

"You must have had good dreams yourself, Bettles," said Traveller. "For a while there I thought I was in a pigsty what with the stink and the snorting going on. Then I realized it was all coming from your bed. I hope you changed your blanket this morning."

Alf made the mistake of giggling, little beads of saliva bubbling out of his mouth. Suddenly, Bettles stepped forward and grabbed his crotch. "Don't laugh at me, Alf. I don't like it."

Alf shrieked as Bettles squeezed his testicles. Gowan turned around.

"What the hell's going on?"

Bettles stepped back while poor Alf clutched himself, tears in his eyes.

"What's going on?" Gowan repeated glaring at them.

Traveller put his arm around Alf's shoulder. "The poor lad bumped into a trestle. He'll be all right."

The trestles weren't close by, but Gowan didn't question the explanation. "Watch where you're going, you knocky lad."

Alf was still convulsed with pain and Traveller started to walk him up and down. Murdoch struggled to contain his own anger. He didn't dare get drawn into anything. All he

could do was vow to himself that he'd see that Bettles got paid back.

Gowan stabbed his finger at Bettles. "You, get chopping or I'll throw you out. There's plenty of blocks coming now. You too, Traveller. The boy can sit out for a few minutes, but you ain't his nurse so you can leave him."

Traveller returned to the trestle and picked up his axe. He didn't say anything, just stacked his blocks and started to chop. Both Bettles and Kearney were tensed and ready for retaliation, but as none was forthcoming, they had no choice but to pick up their axes and start to work. Murdoch cautiously resumed his chopping as well. Jesse was collecting the split pieces of wood and carrying them over to carts near the wall. For the next little while, everybody was busy, the yard filled with the thunk, thunk of the axes. Murdoch was starting to sweat despite the cold.

What happened next was so fast, he didn't see it. He had bent down to stack his next block of wood. He glimpsed Traveller raising his axe to swing at his own piece, but somehow the axe flew out of his hand. Bettles was standing about eight feet away and the axe caught him on the side of the head. He dropped to the ground, blood gushing from his split scalp. Kearney yelled and ran over to him, as did Murdoch. Bettles groaned and tried to sit up.

"Don't move," said Murdoch. He went to get out his handkerchief, forgetting he didn't have one. "Damn it."

The pastor and the tramp major came over to see what had happened.

"Do you have a handkerchief?" Murdoch asked them and Reverend Harris quickly handed him one of fine white linen. Murdoch wiped away some of the blood from Bettles's head.

"Hold this tight against your head and sit up slowly," he said to Bettles.

"What the hell happened?" asked Gowan.

"My axe must 'ave slipped," said Traveller. "The wood is wet. I trust I haven't caused this man a serious injury,"

The manager swirled around and glared at him.

"What the hell were you doing? You could've brained the man."

"I told you my axe slipped. Ain't that right, Kearney? You saw what happened. It was an accident."

The Irishman could only nod. Bettles looked murderous. The blood was spilling through his fingers and down his hand into his sleeve.

"He should get to a doctor," Murdoch said to Gowan.

All the men had stopped their work and were standing gawking.

"You, Kearney, help him to the infirmary. The rest of you, the opera's over, get back to work."

Bettles managed to get to his feet but shook off Kearney's hand.

"I can manage," he said. He looked over at Traveller but didn't speak. He didn't have to. His message was obvious. With the pastor hovering on one side and Kearney on the other, he left the yard, drops of blood marking their path. Even Alf was quiet.

Traveller turned back to the piece of wood he'd been chopping. "He'll be all right. Scalp wounds always bleed a lot."

He grinned at Murdoch, who restacked his log. He made sure he wasn't standing where there could be another accidental slip.

About half an hour later, Kearney and the minister returned.

"How's Bettles?" asked Murdoch.

"He's on the mend. The bleeding has stopped," answered Harris.

"Thank the Lord," said Traveller in a loud voice. "I am spared having the death of a man on my conscience."

He was palpably insincere.

Kearney moved as far away from Traveller as possible and work continued for two hours without pause, although even the young loggers slowed down. Murdoch saw Harris say something to Gowan, who at first shook his head then with obvious reluctance got down from his stool and left the yard. Murdoch wiped his forehead. He was among the younger men there and certainly one of the fittest and he was finding the relentless work tiring as he'd had no real food since yesterday. The miserable bit of bread and skilly didn't count.

Gowan reappeared, followed by the two elderly nabbers, both carrying buckets. Hastings ran his bell for attention and the tramp major bellowed, "Listen up, you men. You're lucky today. Our manager, Reverend Harris, has a tender heart. He has asked me to give you a ten-minute respite. Not that some of you need it from what I can see, but he's the boss. You can get a cup of water from the bucket here, but no more than ten minutes." He took out a large steel watch from his vest pocket. "I'm timing starting now."

With so much sawdust flying around, all of the men were thirsty, but they had been well trained and they lined up in two docile lines, each dipping in the bucket, gulping down the water, then passing the iron cup to the next man. Murdoch deliberately hung back so he could get next to Parker. He went first and he gulped the metallic-tasting water and handed over the cup, with a slight nod. Ed drank, then hopped away, Murdoch walking beside him.

"Well?"

"I managed to get a better look at Traveller's boots.

I think they're mine."

"Are you sure?"

Ed screwed up his face. "Not sure exactly, but they could be."

"Damn it, Ed. You said that about Alf's boots, and Bettles."

"Well they could be too. I told you old boots look alike. But both those coves are my size."

Murdoch didn't think Alf could be a murderer, but from what he'd witnessed so far, he wouldn't eliminate Bettles and probably not Traveller.

Gowan rang his bell. "Back to work, you men. We don't want you to catch cold now, do we?"

Murdoch walked back to his spot, hefted his axe, and swung down at the block of wood. A searing pain shot up from his lower back and he yelped. He tried to straighten up, but his body refused to co-operate and all he could do was stand bent forward. He took a few steps, hoping the pain would ease but it was excruciating. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't stand upright. He dropped the axe and hobbled over to Gowan.

"I'll have to stop, my back has seized up."

Gowan guffawed. "Of course it has. Well you can stop Mr. Williams but if you do, you'll have to leave. No tasty hot soup for you."

"I think he really has hurt himself," said Harris timidly. "He probably got chilled. He's been working hard, I've noticed. Surely we can make an exception."

"Begging your pardon, sir, but you don't know these men like I do. They're better actors than a music-hall troupe."

It was all Murdoch could do not to grab the man by the throat and throttle him. The only thing that prevented him was the fact that he was bent over in an agonizing and undignified way.

"Thank you for your kind words, Mr. Harris. You can stuff your hot soup up a place where it will surely burn, Mr. Gowan. I'm leaving."

Parker, who was sitting nearby, grinned, but Murdoch sensed the fellow was rather enjoying his discomfiture. He crept back to where he'd left his hat and coat, feeling as if he had suddenly aged twenty years. Traveller stopped chopping.

"Sorry you hurt yourself, Mr. Williams. That old injury, I suppose."

Murdoch nodded. Traveller picked up his coat for him and helped him to put it on. Alf patted his back solicitously and smiled at him.

"Are you coming back here tonight?" Murdoch asked Traveller.

"Mebbe. Or we might go over to the House of Providence. They have better food even if you do have to go to mass in the morning. What about you? What will you do?"

"I'm not sure of anything except I won't be here another night."

"Goodbye, then. Perhaps our paths will cross again."

As far as Murdoch was concerned, they were going to cross very soon.

He shook hands with both of them and hobbled as best he could out of the yard, Gowan watching him to see if he could catch him malingering.

Chapter Thirty-Four

THE PREVIOUS NIGHT , SARAH DIGNAM had retired to her room as soon after supper as she could without exciting a barrage of questions from Elias about her health. As he believed all illnesses to be caused by poor bowel function, he was apt to ask her embarrassingly personal questions no matter who was present. Fortunately, his attention had been diverted by May Flowers, who had refused to leave her good friend until she was reassured she was exhausted and thinking only of bed. May had remained until almost eleven o'clock, and Sarah heard her high-pitched laughter as she cheered Elias up. He was laughing too and she wondered if he would ever give up his lifelong dedication to bachelorhood and succumb to the full bosomy charms of her friend.

Sarah felt a stab of loneliness at the thought, so intense she closed her eyes. Her love was dead and any possibility of finding fulfillment in a matrimonial embrace was gone. She touched the back of her hand to her cheek. She was hot. Her head was aching and her throat felt dry and sore. She was coming down with something, she was certain. She had slept so badly that she stayed in bed late even though Walters had fussed outside the door. Thank goodness Elias was a late riser and he hadn't come with some new physic.

Sarah reached for the bible under her pillow and turned to the Song of Solomon. She didn't really need to read it. The verses were so familiar to her by now, she could recite them by heart.

"I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me."

She was in the room where she had been born, perhaps conceived, although she was not comfortable imagining her tiny mother having connections with the large burly man she knew as her father. Elias had taken their father's room after he died, and she naturally had requested to have the pleasant front room that had been her mother's bedchamber. She had replaced little over the years, changing the wallpaper only once. However, the green and burgundy flock she chose was so similar to the previous covering, she hardly remembered the old one. The mahogany bed was the same as her mother had used, but Sarah had brought in her own dresser and wardrobe. Her room was a comfort to her. Elias had never stepped foot in it since their father died and he had come to wake her with the news.

"By night on my bed, I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him but I found him not ... I held him and would not let him go ..."

She had never held Charles or been held by him. Not so long ago, when she was leaving the church, she had turned her ankle on the steps and he had caught hold of her arm. She had pressed her hand into his as she regained her balance. Even through the leather of her glove, she could feel the strong sinews of his hand and it was all she could do not to press his palm against her cheek.

She touched the plain gold cross that was hanging around her neck.

"A bundle of myrrh is my well beloved unto me; he shall lie all night betwixt my breasts."

Tentatively, she placed her hands on her breasts, soft and pendulous under the silk of her nightgown.

"His left hand is under my head and his right hand doth embrace me."

No man had caressed her in the way that she knew men caressed women.

When she was a child, she'd heard the cook chatting with one of the maids. The girl had a follower, whom Sarah had seen coming to call for her on Sunday mornings. The maid had said to the cook, "He stroked my diddies." And she'd squealed with excitement when she said it. Sarah had later asked her nanny what the word meant and she had been alarmed at the upset her innocent question had caused. The maid had been dismissed immediately and even the kind old cook had been severely reprimanded. "Little pitchers have big ears," said Nanny and afterwards as long as they had servants, Sarah felt the constraint between them.

"This thy stature is like to a palm tree and thy breasts to clusters of grapes."

She moved her hand down to her stomach, which in spite of her small frame, felt too full and flabby without her corset.

"Thy belly is like an heap of wheat set about with lilies."

Chapter seven had been May's responsibility and she had done a very poor job. None of the passion of the verses made sense as symbolic of Christ and the church. Charles had said to think of the holy state of matrimony and the sanctified love between a man and his wife. Sarah had wondered about Charles and if he had thought of the joints of his wife's thighs as jewels, *"the work of a cunning workman."* She had pushed that thought away at once, of course. She didn't like Louisa. Thank goodness she didn't come to the prayer circle, flaunting her position. Sarah noticed how she always made a point of placing her hand on Charles's arm, as if to claim her possession. When she spoke in company, she frequently said, "Charles and I," reminding everybody present that they were bound together. True love needed no such ostentatious display, as Sarah well knew.

Charles had asked her to present chapter eight, "and especially let us look at verse six," were his exact words. "Let us especially look at verse six."

"Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire which hath a most vehement flame."

Sarah got out of bed and went over to the mirror. Her fine hair was hanging loosely about her face, she had been too tired to braid it last night. She was quite grey now, not blonde, and in the dull morning light, she looked old and haggard. *"You have such fine eyes, Miss Dignam, if I may say so."* No, that is not exactly what he'd said, he said her blue dyed caperine brought out the colour of her eyes but he might as well have said she had fine eyes. He, himself, had startlingly beautiful blue eyes. She'd asked May if she thought so too, but her friend had only looked at her curiously. *"They're not that unusual,"* she said, but then May never acknowledged any of Sarah's enthusiasms, ever.

She closed her eyes, trying by an effort of will to remember Charles how he had been, not the way he was when she had last seen him, with a bloody socket where his eye had been. How many times had she imagined pressing gentle kisses on those eyes, taking the black lashes as delicate as moth wings into her mouth.

Abruptly, she opened her eyes and met her own image in the mirror. She reached into the drawer, took out the piece of bloodstained paper, and held it against her cheek. His hands had touched it and therefore she was touching him.

"The watchmen that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me: the keepers of the walls took away my veil from me."

She had to tell the truth no matter what the cost. She owed it to Charles and the love he had declared to her.

Walking eased the spasm somewhat, but Murdoch still couldn't stand up straight by the time he reached the police station. Fortunately, Seymour was on duty and Murdoch

didn't have to go through a long explanation about why he was dressed the way he was.

"What the heck happened to you?" Seymour asked.

"I was overzealous. I forgot I wasn't twenty years old any more."

"Was it worth it?"

"I'm not sure yet, but we might have some evidence on the case. I want you to send Crabtree and Dewhurst over to the House of Industry right away. There are four men there I want brought in for questioning. The names are Bettles, Kearney, Trevelyan, also known as Traveller, and a simpleton named Alf. Keep Bettles and Kearney in a separate cell from the other two. Also make sure Ed Parker comes back to the station. I haven't finished with him." Murdoch scratched at his chest. "Oh God, I had a bath last night but I'd dearly love to sit in a hot tub for a couple of hours. I must get out of these clothes. Do they smell as bad to you as they do from here?"

Seymour nodded. "'Fraid so. Rotten egg kind of smell."

"That's the sulphur they use for fumigating." Murdoch started to go toward the rear door then stopped. "Charlie, could you send out for a couple of meat pies before I keel over from hunger?"

"Of course."

"And if you don't mind, I'm going to burn these clothes. They will probably stink, but I can't bear them for a minute longer." Standing still hadn't helped his back and he groaned as he went to open the door. "Where is Crabtree, by the way? Any new developments on the case?"

"Not that I know of, but I had to send him out on another case. We've had one of those bloody tragedies with carbon monoxide gas fumes. Typical story, people use the worst coke because that's all they can afford and the landlord doesn't get the chimneys cleaned properly. An entire family, including one poor cripple lad, died upstairs and an elderly

man in a room downstairs. Two other occupants are very ill, one might not live. Crabtree and Dewhurst are at the house now." Murdoch stared at him "Where is it?"

"Sherbourne Street, south of Gerrard."

"Do you know the names of the people?"

Seymour checked the notepad on his desk. "The elderly cove downstairs was a Thomas Hicks and the family upstairs was Pugwell, no sorry, Tugwell. There was Mrs. Tugwell, her young crippled son, and her grown daughter."

"My God, Charlie, when did this all happen?" "Sometime in the night. Why, do you know them?"

"I was just there yesterday. The Tugwells were on Howard's visiting list, a family whose application he rejected."

Seymour whistled through his teeth. "Are we looking at a coincidence here or are the incidents connected?"

"I don't know, but I'd better get up there right away. How were they discovered?"

"One of the local ministers dropped in early this morning and found them all dead. He got one of the neighbour's boys to run for the beat constable. Fortunately, it was Burley's watch and he's a good lad with a clear head in an emergency. He figured out what had happened, and opened all the windows. He had to smash some of them apparently. He just got the other two women out in time or they'd be dead too."

"Damation, Charlie. What the hell is going on?" "Look, you'd better get over there. I'll send Fyfer and Wylie to pick up the tramps. We'll hold them here until you get back."

Murdoch went to head out the door.

"Will, you should change your clothes first."

"Damn. You're going to have to help me, Charlie."

Chapter Thirty-Five

MURDOCH HAD RETRIEVED his wheel from the station and he found that although bicycling was easier than walking, getting on and off the bike was a problem. He had difficulty straightening up when he parked his bicycle near the house on Sherbourne Street. There was the usual crowd of onlookers gathered outside by now, not nearly as well dressed as the one that had gathered outside the church, but the morbid curiosity was the same. A police ambulance waited in front and Burley was keeping guard at the door. He greeted Murdoch with a salute.

"Good morning, sir."

"The bodies are still here, I presume?"

"Yes, sir, and the physician has just arrived."

"The air has cleared now?"

"Yes, sir."

They both glanced back at the house. The front windows on both floors were smashed.

"I hear you acted very promptly, constable. Well done."

Burley flushed with pleasure. "Thank you, sir. I'm keeping my fingers crossed that the two ladies will live. They was both unconscious but they revived a bit in the air."

"Have you had time to inspect the fireplaces?"

"No, sir, but Constable Crabtree and Constable Higgins are in there now."

Murdoch took a deep breath, not because he feared the carbon monoxide might be still lingering in the house but because he didn't relish what he knew he was going to see.

He went inside. The door to Hicks's room was open. His body was in his chair close by the hearth. A book was at his

feet where it had fallen. His eyes were open and his face was covered with the typical red blotches caused by monoxide poisoning. There was a sour smell of vomit in the room and Murdoch could see Hicks's dressing gown was stained down the front. Constable Crabtree was at the fireplace, holding a lantern so he could examine the chimney.

"Find anything, George?" Murdoch asked. As best he could he bent down to look. Crabtree glanced at him startled.

"I did it chopping wood. I'll explain later," said Murdoch. "Aim your light, will you?"

The constable did so. "Looks like a brick came loose and caused a blockage." Murdoch reached up and released a small shower of debris. "The whole bloody thing needs repairing. I wish we could prosecute the miserly landlords who prey off poor people like Hicks. They take their money and do nothing. It's disgusting."

He eased himself away.

Crabtree poked in the coal scuttle, which was by the hearth. "He was burning the cheapest variety of coke. The fumes must have backed up. He probably didn't know what was happening. The same with the people upstairs, who were all in bed asleep. As I understand it, there were three of them in the family and we did find the bodies of two females in one bed and that of a young man in a cot by the window." He paused. "The sad thing was, it looked like he'd tried to get out of bed, probably feeling ill, but he couldn't do anything. Apparently, he suffered from the palsy." Crabtree consulted his notebook. "The two women who live in the room next to Mr. Hicks are sisters, Miss Emma and Larissa Leask. There's a connecting door that's been plastered over but not very well. The only reason they survived at all is that they always sleep with their window open, but Miss Emma is elderly and she is critically ill at the moment. Next to the Tugwells on the second floor are a man and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Simon McGillivary. They are in the

hospital but expected to recover, although Mrs. McGillivary is with child and the doctors are most concerned about the baby's future welfare. On the third floor there are three tenants. A German man, Mr. Werner Einboden, and his wife, Gudren, on one side of the stairwell and a bachelor by the name of Philip Taylor on the other. He works a night shift at the newspaper office and he wasn't at home. The Einbodens both have severe headaches, but other than that they are all right."

"Where are they now?"

"Across the street with one of the neighbours, a Mrs. Cole."

"Does the blocked chimney look like an accident to you, George?"

"It's impossible to say, sir. He may have killed himself. Suicides will do this sort of thing to make it look like an accident so the family doesn't lose out on insurance. You talked to him, sir. Did you think he was unbalanced?"

"He was a lonely man full of sorrow, but I wouldn't say unbalanced and I'm sure he'd know his act could cause the death of other people."

"Not everybody realizes how monoxide travels, sir."

"Mr. Hicks was very well read. He used to be an engineer, he told me."

"It's hard to imagine somebody blocked that chimney deliberately. But I suppose we have to keep that under consideration, don't we, sir?"

"He never went out. He'd hardly sit there while some cove went and stopped up his chimney. Besides, what earthly reason would anybody have for murdering a frail old man like this?"

Crabtree didn't answer. They'd both seen enough of human depravity to know almost anything was possible.

Murdoch went over to the dead man and, with difficulty, bent to pick up the book that had fallen from Hicks's lap. It was the Book of Common Prayer.

"I was going to bring you a book to read, but I didn't get around to it. I only wish you'd had a chance to read some more rollicking tales, Mr. Hicks."

"Shall I go and round up a jury, sir?"

"Yes, indeed, George. I'll go upstairs and talk to the physician. Who is it, by the way?"

"Dr. Ogden again."

"Good."

Murdoch waited until the constable had left, then he gently closed the staring eyes of the dead man. He made the sign of the cross.

"May God have mercy on your soul."

Stiffly, he climbed the stairs to the second floor and went into the Tugwells' room. Dr. Ogden had just finished her examination of the bodies and she turned to greet him.

"Good afternoon, Detective Murdoch. Oh dear, you have lumbago, I see."

"Yes, ma'am. I was chopping wood."

"Do you have a female at home?"

"Er, no, ma'am, I'm not married."

"I don't mean that. I mean is there somebody at home who could use an iron on you?"

"Er, I'm not quite sure what you are asking me, doctor?"

She smiled slightly. "The best treatment that I know of is to have somebody apply a hot iron to your lower back muscles. It should be done over thick brown paper, but one or two treatments like that will cure you in no time."

It was on the tip of Murdoch's tongue to say, "Yes, Sister," but he caught himself.

She turned her attention back to the bed where Esther Tugwell and her daughter were lying side by side. Except for the pallor of their skin, they could have been asleep. Dr. Ogden had removed the tattered quilt to do her examination, but otherwise the situation was clearly as it had been when they went to bed. There was no sign of disturbance or struggle. Murdoch could see the same red

blotches on both of their faces that had been on Hicks, but neither of the women had vomited. The son was a different matter. He had obviously tried to get out of bed and he was entangled with his blanket, half on the floor.

“Rigor mortis is well established but carbonic monoxide poisoning tends to delay the onset so it is more difficult to determine with accuracy when death occurred. But I’d say they all died at approximately the same time, which would be no earlier than ten o’clock last night but could have been as late as one or two in the morning.”

“Is there any doubt that the monoxide was the cause of death?” Murdoch asked.

She snapped the clips shut on her medical bag. “None at all. There are no signs of trauma to the bodies, except for the lad bruising his face when he fell to the floor. I intend to do the postmortem examination this afternoon. You can attend if you wish or I will have the results sent to you immediately.”

The other constable had been standing by the window, looking a little queasy.

“Higgins, did you examine the chimney in this room?” Murdoch asked.

“Yes, sir. It was clear.”

“Poor innocent souls,” said the doctor.

“I understand the fumes originated down below with a blocked chimney.”

“It looks that way, ma’am.”

She tugged her gloves on. “No matter how much you might warn them, people are so careless. He was probably using coke.”

“Yes, he was. A poor quality.”

“That wretched fuel should be outlawed.”

“It’s cheaper, ma’am.”

“I’m aware of that, detective. As far as I am concerned the poor are often their own worst enemies.” With that she headed for the door but paused in front of Higgins.

“Constable, you should go outside at once. The gas can linger for a long time. Mr. Murdoch, don’t forget my suggestion concerning your back and above all, keep your bowels open.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Chapter Thirty-Six

MRS. COLE , THE NEIGHBOUR who had offered refuge to the German couple, was a young woman, plump and pretty, who was obviously newly married and set up in her own house for the first time. The furnishings were sparse and cheap but brand new and the air was thick with the smell of beeswax polish. She served the three of them underbaked cake and weak coffee but with such kindness and hospitality, Murdoch thought Mr. Cole was a lucky man.

The Einbodens, who were seated on Mrs. Cole's best couch, seemed desperately poor, spoke little English, and were extremely nervous. It took a while for Murdoch to make himself understood and in turn to understand their replies. What he finally came away with was that Hicks may have had a visitor late that night, but as he was in the habit of reading out loud they couldn't possibly swear to that. Nobody had visited the Tugwells and Josie had come home with her usual noise about nine o'clock. The Misses Leasks were spiteful old women who didn't like foreigners and they had nothing to do with them. The same with Mr. and Mrs. McGillivray. They never saw Mr. Taylor. Only for Thomas Hicks did they shed a tear. Metaphorically. They were both too afraid of Murdoch to show any emotion other than a cringing subservience.

After an hour, he took his leave. Burley was standing guard at the rooming house, but the ambulance had left and the blustery wind had scattered the curious like pieces of newspaper. The constable had nothing to report and Murdoch headed for the station. Sitting down for so long had stiffened up his back and even riding his wheel was painful.

Seymour greeted him as soon as he walked into the station. His usual dour face was beaming.

"Very good news, Will. We brought in the tramps and I think we've nabbed our man. See here." He held up a man's silver watch. "It fits the description exactly of Reverend Howard's piece."

Murdoch took it from him and flipped open the lid. Inside was engraved the date, *October 30, 1892*, and the initials, *C.H.*

"Excellent. Who had it?"

"Jack Trevelyan. It was hidden in the lining of his coat. Constable Fyfer gave them all a thorough search that I doubt they'd experienced since the midwife pulled them into the world. He's a good officer, that one."

"Indeed. What did Traveller have to say for himself?"

"Says he found the watch in the Horticultural Gardens on Tuesday. Says he hid it because he was spending the night in the workhouse and you can't trust anybody in that place."

"What about the other three?"

"The simpleton is enjoying himself, as far as I can see. Won't stop giggling. He didn't have anything hidden. Bettles and his mate are as tough a pair of natty lads as I've come across. They both had knives tucked in their boots and almost ten dollars between them hidden in their coats. So much for being paupers. They're richer than I am."

"Let me talk to Traveller. Will you have him brought to my office."

"Do you want him cuffed?"

"We'd better. But, Charlie, can you bring in some food. He hasn't had anything to eat since yesterday."

The sergeant chuckled. "You're in luck, Will. Katie sent me off this morning with a pork pie that would feed an army. I've had my fill. He can have the rest of it."

The mere mention of Katie's pork pie made Murdoch's stomach growl.

"If there's enough for two, I wouldn't mind some later."

He walked slowly to his cubicle of an office and eased himself into the chair behind the desk. Within a few minutes, he heard footsteps in the hall and Constable Fyfer appeared in the threshold.

"He's here, sir."

If Murdoch hadn't heard them he would have smelled them coming. The odour of sulphur permeated the cubicle. "Bring him in."

Fyfer pulled aside the reed curtain and stepped back so that Traveller could enter. Murdoch had expected the tramp to be surprised when he saw him, but he merely grunted and sat down promptly on the chair.

Murdoch nodded at Fyfer, who withdrew to the hall.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Trevelyan," said Murdoch.

"Good afternoon to you. How's your back?"

"Sore."

"You should have known better than to put your block on the ground like that."

"I know. I was also chilled ... you don't seem surprised to see me."

"Not the least. I suspected you was a nark from the beginning, that's why I kept you close to me. I weren't totally sure until we was in the ward. You gave yourself away there."

"In what way?"

"Well it was how you handled those toe rags, Bettles and Kearney. You knew what you were doing, for one thing. And I thought to myself, This cove ain't no wayfarer." Traveller chortled. "We tobies tend to fight a bit more dirty, if you know what I mean. Like they was about to. But it was good what you did with Alf last night. I would have taken care of him, but what you did was manly."

Murdoch couldn't help but grin. Here was Traveller, up to his neck in hot water, dishing out compliments like he was a schoolteacher.

"And you got me out of trouble so I'm grateful to you for that," said Murdoch.

Traveller shrugged. "I'd have done it for anybody. I told you, those scum was after me." He raised his hands. "Would you consider taking these off. I ain't so stupid as to cause trouble in a police station."

Murdoch called out to the constable. "Fyfer, will you uncuff Mr. Trevelyan? And will you tell Sergeant Seymour we're ready?"

The constable came in and unlocked the handcuffs and Traveller rubbed at his wrists. "They was put on too tight."

Fyfer looked as if he would like to stand by and get in on the proceedings, but Murdoch nodded at him to leave.

Traveller gazed around the cubicle, taking in the shabby furniture. "I would have thought a detective would have a fancier place than this."

"Money's tight everywhere."

"Ha. Ain't that the truth."

Murdoch reached in his drawer and took out his pipe and a packet of tobacco. "Have you got your pipe?"

"No, it's taken a walk. And me baccy."

"You can use mine." Murdoch pushed a box of matches and the tobacco packet across the desk. "It's a good Bull Durham."

Traveller filled the pipe, lit up, and drew in deeply, letting go with a sigh of appreciation. "I suppose you're wanting to ask me about the watch I found. I hear it used to belong to some poor fellow who got himself murdered."

"Who told you that?"

"The constable who found it in my coat."

Damn, thought Murdoch. Fyfer should have kept that to himself.

"Where *did* you find it?"

"Like I told him. In the Gardens."

"Where exactly?"

Traveller blew out some smoke. "Near the entrance to the greenhouse. I was in there keeping warm a couple of days ago and when I was leaving, to get to my hotel, which was about to open, I saw the watch lying on a bench."

"There might have been a reward offered, why didn't you turn it in to the police?"

Traveller grinned at him. "'Cos you lot would immediately suspect me of stealing it and I'd be bothered with a lot of questions like now and it is very unlikely I'd get a reward. I don't have a watch to keep track of my appointments so I thought finder's keepers."

"What day was this exactly?"

"Can't say exactly. Wayfarers tend to lose all track of time. Wasn't yesterday, could have been the day before, but I won't swear to it."

I bet you won't, thought Murdoch. Vagueness is a good defence until you find out where the trouble is.

"Did you see anybody while you were in the greenhouse? Did you talk to anybody?"

"Yes, I did as a matter of fact. A gawdelpus. A good fellow he was. He gave me two nickels."

"Did you ask him for money?"

"Not me. You and me both know that's against the law."

"What time was it when you encountered this charitable gentleman?"

"I can't tell you that. Like I said, we tobies don't have a good sense of time. We had a little chat or, more precisely, the gentleman talked to me about my sins. They always like to practise Sunday's sermon on folks like me, do the gawdelpuses. Then he walked off and I stayed thinking about my Saviour for the next little while, then I left too. When I found the watch it was reading ten minutes to five."

"So you must have met up with him about, what, half an hour earlier?"

"It's possible, but I wouldn't swear to it."

Murdoch sighed. He was up against a professional here.

"How long were you in the greenhouse altogether?"

"It's hard to say. I had a little kip on a bench so maybe a couple of hours. I left just before five o'clock to get to the spike. You know how it's better to be there early." Traveller took another deep draw on the pipe. "I'm curious, by the way, as to what you were doing there? It can't be because you're a pauper, even, begging your pardon, with a crib like this."

"Frankly, I was looking for you. Maybe not you specifically but a tramp I thought might be able to answer some questions concerning Reverend Howard."

"Do you suspect a wayfarer killed the gentleman?"

"Yes, I do."

"It's always easier, isn't it, to pin the crime on one of us? Saves you a lot of work."

"That's not the reason."

Murdoch pulled the box out from underneath his desk and put Howard's boots on the desk.

"Have you seen these before?"

"No, can't say I have, but they look uncommon good boots. Not yours, are they?"

"They originally belonged to the murdered man. They were taken from his body by somebody who wore them in the workhouse, where they were stolen a second time. I obtained them from the second thief."

"Must be good boots."

Murdoch drummed his fingers on the desk. He wasn't getting very far with the wily old fox. "Tell me, Traveller, have you ever been in Guelph?"

There was a flash of wariness in the man's eyes. He paused to draw on the pipe again. "Yes, I've been there. Just last week as a matter of fact. It's more comfortable than the House of Industry, I promise you that. Wish I could have stayed."

Murdoch tapped at the boots. "Do you swear to me you didn't take these from the pastor's body?"

Traveller's face was briefly hidden in a cloud of smoke. "I'm getting the impression it don't matter much what I say. You've got me tagged as the murderer and I can protest till I'm blue in the face but you ain't going to change your mind."

He put down the pipe and held out his hands to Murdoch.

"You'd better put the cuffs on right now and make your arrest. It'll look good for you."

There was a knock on the wall outside and Seymour pushed through the reed curtain. He was carrying a plate on which sat a thick wedge of pork pie.

Murdoch held up his hand. "Never mind, Sergeant Seymour, Mr. Trevelyan isn't hungry after all. In fact, he's going back to the cell. Put the handcuffs on him."

Seymour deposited the plate on top of the filing cabinet by the door and Murdoch saw Traveller cast one quick glance at the aromatic pie.

Murdoch watched while the sergeant led the docile tramp away.

Chapter Thirty-Seven

SEYMOUR RETURNED a few minutes later.

"Are you going to charge him, Will?"

"Not at the moment. Contrary to what he thinks, I'm not partial to making tramps scapegoats. He's bloody evasive for sure but that might be habitual and nothing to do with the murder. But I do know this, George, our Mr. Traveller will only tell me when it suits him. I want you to get him to remove his boots and bring them here. He'll have to go in his socks." Murdoch pointed at the piece of pie on the cabinet. "Is there more of that?"

"Like I said, Katie made enough for an army. There's at least two more servings left in the dish."

"Good."

Murdoch grabbed the plate and stuffed the pie into his mouth, swallowing it down in two gulps. Seymour grinned at him.

"Shall I give Katie your compliments?"

"Cardboard would have tasted good, but don't tell her that." He wiped his mouth with his handkerchief. "All right, let's bring in Alf. You don't need to cuff him."

Seymour left, taking the plate with him, and Murdoch managed to drop the boots into the box again and put the watch underneath his notebook.

He could hear Alf giggling as they approached the cubicle. Seymour brought him in and indicated he should sit in the chair.

"Hello, Alf," said Murdoch.

The boy stared at him in bewilderment. "Are you under arrest too?"

"No, lad. I'm actually a police detective. I was only pretending to be a tramp because I'm trying to find a very bad man."

"Is he a tramp?"

"He might be."

"Mr. Traveller isn't a bad man, but Mr. Bettles is."

"How long have you known Mr. Traveller?"

"A long, long time."

"A few months? A year or more? How long exactly?"

Alf laughed. "Weeks and weeks. He looks after me." Murdoch could see the lad was shivering with fear and he smiled at him.

"I just want to ask you a couple of questions, Alf, then the sergeant is going to take you outside and get you some hot pies with gravy. You don't have to be afraid. Nobody will hurt you."

Murdoch hoped he could make good this promise, but he also knew there was much truth in Traveller's accusation. Tramps and simpletons were easy marks and Inspector Brackenreid, for one, wasn't a patient man especially when a person of the better class had been killed.

He took the watch out of the drawer. "Have you ever seen this before, Alf?"

The boy nodded eager to please. "Yes, sir. I saw it just this morning. Did somebody pinch it?"

"Where did you see it?"

"The pastor in the woodyard was wearing it. Don't you remember? He looked at it a lot, I noticed."

Murdoch sighed. He vaguely recalled Reverend Harris consulting a silver watch.

He leaned over and lifted out the boots from the box. "What about these? Have you ever seen anybody wearing these? You can look at them if you want to."

Alf examined the boots, turned them over, bent back the soles, and sniffed at them. "Good boots," he said, a note of pride in his voice. Alf knew boots.

"I want you to think back. Not last night, but the night before that, did you notice if any of the tramps were wearing them?"

Alf thought about the question sombrely. "Them's good boots. You'd better take care of them. When you get into the bath they could get nicked, good boots like that."

Murdoch dragged over the other box with his foot and took out the pair of boots he'd found in the greenhouse.

"Have you seen these boots, Alf?"

The boy laughed out loud. "'Course I have. They're mine."

Murdoch did a quick check of the boy's feet. He was wearing shabby black boots very like the ones on the desk. "You've got your boots on, Alf. Did you have two pairs?"

Puzzled, Alf looked down, then grinned. "No, only ever had but one. They could be mine though."

Murdoch reached over and patted the boy's arm. "Thanks, Alf. Do you have a family you could go and stay with?"

"No, sir. They throwed me out. 'Alf,' they says to me, 'you eat more than the horse does so we're throwing you out.'"

"Where did you live?"

Again Alf assumed his thoughtful expression. "I don't rightly remember, sir. In the country it was though." He giggled. "'You eat more than the horse,' they says to me."

Murdoch reached in his pocket and took out a fifty-cent piece. "Here, my lad. One of the constables is going to take you to get something to eat and you can have whatever you want."

"Cake and custard. Can I have cake and custard?"

"Of course. As much as you can get for fifty cents."

Alf grabbed Murdoch's hand and planted a wet kiss on it. "Thank you, Mr. Williams. I'll save some for you for tonight."

There was no point in explaining to him that he wouldn't be coming back to the workhouse, so Murdoch just nodded. He called for Fyfer to collect him and as they were leaving, Alf asked, "Is Mr. Traveller coming for cake too?"

"Not at the moment. He's helping us to find the bad man."

“That’s Mr. Bettles. He was going to hurt me. You and Mr. Traveller saved me.”

Alf looked as if he was going to rush over and give Murdoch another kiss, but Fyfer tugged his arm and led him away.

Murdoch went through the same routine of hiding the watch and the boots. He hadn’t really expected Alf would be of much help, but he’d had to try it.

There were footsteps in the corridor and the now familiar smell of sulphur wafted over as Higgins pushed Bettles through the reed curtain into the cubicle and shoved him into the chair.

“The man thinks he’s a barrister. He keeps moaning that we’re not telling him what he’s being charged with.”

Bettles looked like a casualty from the battlefield. The doctor had trimmed away his hair where the axehead had cut him and wrapped his head in a bandage, now bloodstained. The bruise under his eyes was turning yellow at the edges.

“As I live and breathe, it’s Mr. Williams. That is unless you have a twin who’s a down-and-outer, which I’m inclined to doubt. How’s the mayor going to react when he discovers one of his officers is eating at the taxpayers’ expense?”

To Murdoch’s gratification, he seemed genuinely surprised. Higgins, who didn’t know about Murdoch’s undercover sojourn into the workhouse, looked puzzled. Murdoch nodded at him to leave and faced Bettles.

“I didn’t get much sleep, the food was both lousy and inadequate, and I’ve hurt my back. I’m telling you right now, I’m not in a good skin this morning and I don’t have patience for somebody trying to throw out horse plop. I am investigating a serious crime and you, Mr. Bettles, are a suspect. Do I make myself clear?”

Bettles rubbed his knuckles against his forehead like a sailor. “Ay, ay, sir. What you say is clear enough, but I don’t

have a frigging notion what this serious crime is that I'm supposed to be party to."

Murdoch stared at him for a moment. Bettles had light blue eyes, cold and lifeless as the scales of a dead fish. He could read nothing there, except wariness. He put the pair of boots and the watch on his desk.

"Do you recognize any of these objects?"

"Am I allowed to touch?"

Murdoch nodded and Bettles took his time examining each boot.

"These here look like any dozen tramps might have on their feet, but these ones are good boots. What do you mean 'recognize'? They ain't mine, if that's what you're getting at."

"Do you know whose they were?"

"Sure do. Our friend Traveller was wearing them on Tuesday when we went into the workhouse." Bettles scowled at Murdoch. "Don't tell me the old cove is accusing me of stealing his frigging boots? Is this the serious crime you're talking about?"

"You know bloody well it isn't. We're talking about a murder here, Mr. Bettles. These boots belonged to the murdered man. They were stolen from his body. Would you be prepared to go into a court of law and swear that you saw Mr. Trevelyan wearing them on Tuesday night?"

Bettles leaned back, a smirk of satisfaction on his face. "That depends. Memory can be so unreliable, can't it? We tramps tend to stick together. I wouldn't want to get him in trouble if it weren't true. You said I was a suspect. Is that just because I'm a wayfarer or have you got something else to pin on me?"

"Where did you spend Tuesday afternoon, Mr. Bettles?"

"Ah that's easy. I was nice and cozy in the pauper's common room at the House of Providence. The nuns took pity on me because I had a touch of bronchitis and they let me sit by the fire all afternoon. You can ask them."

"I intend to."

"I should have stayed there, but my three days was up and I was sick and tired of the idolatry." He squinted over at Murdoch. "I'm a Methodist born and raised."

"But you'll accept their charity."

"I'll accept the wampum of a savage if he gives me grub."

Murdoch found himself drumming on the table again. He knew Bettles was too wily to offer an alibi that couldn't be proved. Too bad. Murdoch had been looking forward to incarcerating him.

"By the way, you'll find out when you ask the Sisters that Kearney was with me. I thought I'd save you the trouble of questioning him."

"That's considerate of you."

Bettles shrugged. "Who went to the Grand Silence, then? Who was it you think Traveller did for?"

"I didn't say Jack Trevelyan did for anybody. But I'm investigating the murder of a man named Charles Howard. He was a pastor."

"What happened? Did his sins catch up with him?"

"Why do you say that?"

"Well it wouldn't be a thief that killed him, would it?"

"How can you be so sure?"

"Them church coves don't usually have much dosh. No, correction. They don't usually *carry* much dosh with them in their pockets and such so as folks will think they're Christly but as we all know most of them are a bunch of hypocrites." For the first time, Bettles's eyes had life in them. "I know you despise us men who have come down in the world and need to beg for our supper, but let me tell you, Mister Detective, you get to know the ways of the world when you're looking up from the bottom."

"Name names."

Bettles laughed. "I have a funny kind of brain, mister. Memories come and go like birds on a branch. Sometimes they land and sometimes they don't." He touched his

forefinger to the side of his nose. "Just let me know if there's anybody you particularly want to hear about and if I know, I'll tell you."

Murdoch wanted to reach over the desk and knock the smirk off his face and he might have if he wasn't virtually crippled. But he also knew that Bettles was hardened against intimidation or threats of any kind. All the currency the man had was the insinuation, probably real enough, that he had secret information.

"The thing with detective work, Mr. Bettles, is that you never know how long an investigation is going to last. I'm going to have to keep you here until we've made more progress."

"That don't worry me. It's warm enough and I know by law you're going to have to feed me. It'll be a nice change from chopping logs." He stood up. "We're done then?"

Murdoch raised his voice and called to the constable who was outside in the corridor.

"Take Mr. Bettles back to the cell."

"Do you want to talk to the other fellow?" Higgins asked.

"Not now. Get Crabtree to take his statement concerning his whereabouts on Tuesday afternoon."

The constable took hold of Bettles's arm and led him out. Murdoch got to his feet and a stabbing pain ran up his back. He managed to straighten up slowly. "Did his sins catch up with him?" Bettles had asked. The trouble was the question was a valid one.

Chapter Thirty-Eight

LOUISA HOWARD WAS PALE AND HAGGARD , her eyes red-rimmed from lack of sleep and too much weeping. The drawing room where she received Murdoch was oppressive in the fading afternoon light. All of the mirrors had been soaped and the pictures turned around to face the wall. Black crepe ribbons festooned the fireplace and the window frames.

When he showed her the watch, she clasped it and kissed it. "Does this mean you have apprehended his murderer?"

"Not quite. It was in the possession of a tramp in police custody, but he swears he found it in the greenhouse of the Horticultural Gardens. This may or may not be true. We also have Mr. Howard's boots. I showed them to your maid, Doris, and she is certain they were your husband's. They were almost certainly worn by a tramp, but again we have as yet no definite proof which man this was or if he was indeed the person who murdered your husband."

Louisa was twisting a black silk handkerchief round and round over her fingers.

"But you say you do have a man in custody?"

"Yes, ma'am, I do."

She frowned at him. "But not yet charged?"

"No."

"I fail to understand why not."

"Mrs. Howard, I promise you we are doing everything we can. But I cannot arrest a man unless I am certain he is guilty."

"He had Charles's watch and his boots."

"We know he had the watch, but we don't know if he had worn the boots."

Louisa compressed her lips into a tight thin line. "Mr. Murdoch, our Lord Jesus taught us to love our enemies, but I tell you in all honesty, as each day dawns and I see my fatherless children and I feel my fatherless child stir in my womb, I am less and less able to obey those teachings." She tugged on each end of the handkerchief. "I want to see Charles's killer hanged. I will have no peace until I know this has happened." Her eyes filled with tears and she wiped them harshly away. "I cannot weep any more."

Murdoch hesitated, searching for words that wouldn't hurt her anew. "Mrs. Howard, I understand how you feel and I would never persist in my inquiry if it weren't necessary, but there are some more questions I need to ask you."

"What questions, surely you know enough?"

Her voice was harsh, but Murdoch also thought he detected fear. She had gone curiously still, watching him. Oddly enough her expression reminded him of the one he'd seen on Traveller's face. She was seeking to avoid the place where the trap was set. "Did his sins catch up with him?" Bettles had asked.

"On Tuesday, when I was here with Dr. Ogden, Mr. Drummond came to call on you. You refused to admit him. Why was that, Mrs. Howard?"

She glanced at him in surprise. This was not what she thought he was going to ask. "Mr. Drummond is no friend of mine. He was strongly opposed to Charles's appointment as pastor of this church. I could not bear the thought he might be coming here to gloat. He can have whomever he wants now."

"I understand Mr. Swanzey was the candidate Mr. Drummond supported."

"Yes, he was. Fortunately, Matthew is a man of humility and piety. He was quite reconciled to the choice and was most generous in his support for Charles. Unlike Mr. Drummond, who made it plain for all to see that he despised

my husband. That is why I did not admit him and have no desire to do so even now."

"It must be difficult for you that his house is so close to yours."

"It is. I believe he stands in his shop doorway all day long, watching us. Why, I don't know, but it is most unpleasant."

On his way to the house as he walked along Gerrard, Murdoch had seen Drummond doing just that.

Her anger toward the elder had enlivened Louisa and she jumped to her feet and walked over to the fireplace, stretching out her hands to the blaze.

"Is that all you wished to know, Mr. Murdoch? I must confess I am feeling very tired."

Murdoch paused, trying to find the tactful way to ask his next question.

"There is something else, ma'am, and forgive me for the delicacy of the topic ..."

He could see her back tense but she didn't turn around.

"I repeat, sir, I really am most fatigued. I don't think there is any more I can say to you."

"This concerns Miss Dignam."

Again Murdoch had the distinct impression this was not the question she expected. She glanced over her shoulder in surprise.

"I realize she has had a dreadful shock," continued Murdoch, "and she is most upset, but I wondered if she had a special relationship with your husband."

This question did bring Louisa about to face him. "Special? What on earth do you mean, special?"

"Miss Dignam is a spinster and perhaps has been a lonely woman. Sometimes in those circumstances, women develop fanciful notions about men such as their doctors or their ministers."

He hated himself for putting it that way. He could almost hear Amy Slade's voice castigating him.

Louisa Howard actually laughed. "Sarah Dignam fancied herself in love with my husband, is that what you're getting at?"

Murdoch nodded. "So you were aware of it?"

"Of course I was. Half of the parish knew. She was making quite a fool of herself. Always coming with little gifts, waiting around after prayer meetings, coming early.

Staring at him with eyes that would put a puppy to shame.

Poor Charles, she was driving him to distraction."

Neither Mrs. Howard's voice nor her expression were in the least kind. Murdoch wondered why she had so little sympathy.

"Surely you don't suspect Miss Dignam, do you?"

"I'm just gathering information, ma'am."

"She is a pathetic old soul, but I've never considered her to be deranged. And why would she kill the man she adored?"

She didn't wait for an answer, which was just as well.

Because Murdoch would have had to say that Miss Dignam might have considered herself to be spurned. And hell hath no fury like a woman scorned. That path was quicksand and not one he could in conscience explore with the widow herself. He'd have to speak to Miss Flowers.

His back was seizing up on him and he eased forward in the chair, trying not to wince.

"I won't keep you much longer, Mrs. Howard, but there is one other matter I should tell you about."

"Yes?" Damn, there it was again. Wary as a wild cat.

"When I was here before I asked you if your husband had any enemies. You told me about the work he did as a volunteer for the city's charitable institution and we both thought it worthwhile questioning some of the people applying for charity who he would have visited."

"Yes? It is of no matter now."

"It may be more than we think. I did make inquiries specifically of the ones he had been forced to reject. This morning I discovered that one such family has died in what is probably a tragic accident."

"Why are you telling me this? Surely it has nothing to do with my husband's death? Poor people die all the time. He could not have been responsible."

"I did not mean in the least to imply that he was. The cause of death was carbon monoxide poisoning. The chimney was blocked in the downstairs room and the fumes came up into their room. The downstairs lodger died as well and two other people were made quite ill."

"I am sorry to hear it, but perhaps you can understand that my capability for sympathy is somewhat limited at the moment."

"Of course, ma'am. But I wonder if your husband ever mentioned this family to you. The name is Tugwell, Esther and her daughter, Josie, and son, Wilfred."

Louisa's shock was palpable. "Tugwell? No, I never heard the name before."

You're a bloody poor actress, Murdoch said to himself.

"You say it was an accident?"

"It would appear to be so. As I said, the source of the carbon monoxide was the downstairs chimney. The fumes filled the house. The Tugwells got the worst of it as they were directly above."

For some reason he couldn't fathom, that seemed to relieve her.

"Mr. Murdoch, I realize you are only doing your duty but all this talk of death is most upsetting. I really must ask you to leave." She leaned over and tugged hard on the bell pull. "You have your culprit and I beg you not to bother me again until you have made that arrest. Then I shall be happy to receive you."

Doris came into the room.

“Please show Mr. Murdoch out, Doris. And I will receive no more visitors today.”

“Mr. Swanzey is here, madam. I was just about to let you know.”

Louisa looked flustered. “Yes, of course. Show him in. Goodbye, Mr. Murdoch. Forgive me if I sounded rude, it’s just ...”

“I quite understand, ma’am. I will keep you informed of my progress.”

Doris opened the door and Swanzey came in. He hesitated in the doorway, but Louisa held out her hand to him.

“Matthew, dear friend. I’m so glad to see you.”

Murdoch saw Swanzey flinch, but then he hurried across to her.

Murdoch left. He felt like a hound that had suddenly hit the scent of the fox. He didn’t know where the creature was hiding, but he was sure he was on its trail.

Chapter Thirty-Nine

WHEN MURDOCH RETURNED to the station, Olivia Bagley and Ed Parker were both sitting on the bench in the main hall waiting for him. Olivia was wearing an appalling array of rags as to be almost unrecognizable. She didn't have her false teeth in and when she saw him she smiled a gummy grin.

Murdoch beckoned to them. "Come with me."

They followed him back to his cubicle. He'd forgotten to get an extra chair, so Olivia generously offered the one seat to Ed and she stood beside him. Murdoch went behind his desk.

"We've done what you wanted," said Olivia. "I'd like to get my boy now."

"As soon as I hear your report, you can both go," said Murdoch. He took out his notebook and fountain pen. "Ed, let's start with you. Oh, by the way, I'd like to thank you for your prompt action in the bathhouse. I would have been discovered for sure if you hadn't diverted Dr. Ogden."

Ed looked at him oddly. "Why do you say that?"

"Because he knows who I am –" He saw the expression on Ed's face. "Hold on, are you saying you didn't throw a fit in the bathtub as a distraction?"

"Well, er, as a matter of fact, no. If you get into the infirmary, you at least get some supper and it's quieter."

"Parker, you were supposed to be helping me in there."

He shifted in embarrassment. "Sorry, Mr. Murdoch, I didn't think. As soon as they said a doctor was coming in, I knew I could get myself transferred ... but I did let you know which of the coves might have my old boots on."

Murdoch had collected boots from all four of his nabs and lined them against the wall.

"Have a look at those. Can you identify any pair as yours?"

"I'll have to try them on."

"All right. Mrs. Bagley, help him, will you?"

Olivia came around and undid Ed's laces, easing off the tight boots. Both of them made ostentatious noises as she removed the boot from his injured foot, she of sympathy, he of pain. Murdoch waited until Ed had tried on all three of the other pairs, his expression heavily concentrating, as befitted a man conducting a test of such importance. He tried on each boot a couple of times, even got to his feet and hopped around the tiny space of Murdoch's office.

Finally, Murdoch put a stop to it. "Well?"

"It's very hard to say, sir. I'd only had the boots a couple of months myself, but of all of them, I'd pick these ones."

"It's them for certain," chipped in Olivia. "Who'd got them?"

Murdoch saw no reason not to tell them. "Jack Trevelyan was wearing them."

Ed and Olivia exchanged glances. "Does that mean he was the one who did for the pastor?" asked Ed.

Before he could answer, there was quick rap on the wall outside his cubicle and Gardiner thrust his head through the reed curtain.

"There's a message for you, Mr. Murdoch. Dr. Ogden called. She wants you to telephone her right back. She says it's urgent."

Murdoch got out of his chair as quickly as he could while the two plungers eyed him curiously.

"I'll be right back, don't touch anything," said Murdoch.

"Couldn't stand us a cup of tea, could you, seeing as how we're helping you with your inquiries? We're fair parched, aren't we, Ed?"

Ed nodded vigorously. "Do you mind, sergeant?" Murdoch asked Gardiner. It was clear the sergeant wasn't happy with the request.

"If you think it's necessary, I'll have Callahan make a pot for them," he said.

Murdoch made his way to the telephone table in the front hall. He picked up the receiver and the constable connected him, then went off on Gardiner's orders to mash the tea. Murdoch was glad to have the privacy. Callahan was a nosy chap and Murdoch was sure he stored up bits of dropped information to use later, like a chipmunk gathering nuts. Gardiner, still in a sulk, went back to his desk.

The telephone rang for such a long time Murdoch was on the point of hanging up when Dr. Ogden answered, sounding slightly breathless as if she'd run to the telephone. He picked up the mouthpiece.

"Dr. Ogden, William Murdoch here. I understand you wanted to speak to me."

"Yes. Good. I've just completed the post-mortem examination on Mr. Hicks and I thought you should know immediately that I found prussic acid in his stomach. As soon as I cut him open I could smell it. Very distinctive odour of bitter almonds."

"Good heavens."

"Prussic acid is a favourite poison of suicidal persons, but I don't remember even seeing a bottle when I first examined him. Did you find one or a suicide note?"

"No, neither." Murdoch hooked his foot around the spare stool by the desk, pulled it over, and sat down, suppressing his groan. "Could it have been an accident?"

"That is most unlikely. You can hardly mistake a bottle labelled 'poison' for a glass of water. There wasn't a large amount in the stomach but sufficient to bring about unconsciousness almost immediately. That's why it's so often chosen by self-murderers, it acts quickly before they have a chance to change their minds. But it's most peculiar

you haven't found the bottle. You'll have to search thoroughly."

"I intend to, ma'am."

"It is not completely out of the question that Hicks took the poison somewhere else in the room, say, then walked back to his chair where he collapsed. I'm wondering if he didn't block the chimney himself, hoping his death would seem like an accident, not even thinking he would cause the deaths of innocent people. You'll have to see if he left a will or has an insurance policy on his life."

"Yes, I'll do that. I must say when I met him, he didn't strike me as a man who was in a precarious state of mind."

"Ah yes, but these people are cunning. I've known instances when the closest family members had no notion at all of what was going on in the suicide's mind. Did you say anything that may have upset him?"

Murdoch considered her question. "Not that I am aware of, although he did talk about his deceased wife whom he was sorely missing."

"There you go, then. Does he have children?"

"He said not. Was there any other wounding to the body?"

"None."

"Could another person have forcibly administered the poison, for instance?"

"I saw no such signs."

"Have you examined the other bodies yet?"

"No. I will report back to you when I've done so."

She disconnected and Murdoch hung the receiver on its hook. Goddamn it. So much for his sensitive nostrils sniffing the air. It seemed that the Tugwell connection to Howard's murder was a coincidence after all. And he supposed that Louisa Howard's odd reaction to the news of the tragedy had to do with her hearing that in some way her husband would be held responsible. Poor old Hicks. He got slowly to his feet and walked over to Gardiner.

“Will you send a couple of the constables over to the house on Sherbourne Street. Have them take Mr. Hicks’s room apart. We’re looking for a bottle of prussic acid and maybe even a suicide letter and any papers at all concerning his affairs, a will, insurance policies, that sort of thing. I’ll come as soon as I’ve finished here.”

“I’ll have Fyfer and Higgins go over at once.” Gardiner hesitated. “Will, I have to tell you, I am a Christian man, but I’m itching to get my hands on that tramp. When are you going to make the arrest?”

“I don’t know. We don’t have enough solid proof yet.”

“Leave me alone with him and I’ll beat the confession out of him.”

Murdoch nodded. “I’ll take care of it, Henry.”

“The pastor deserves justice. He was a true servant of our Lord.”

“Yes, I’m sure he was. Tell Fyfer I’ll join him as soon as I can.”

He made his way back to his cubicle. Olivia had taken over his chair and she was in the process of gulping down her mug of tea. Murdoch saw how greedily she was drinking and he felt guilty.

She moved back to Ed as soon as Murdoch came in.

“Everything all right, then? Not terminal, are you?”

“What?”

She grinned hideously. “You just had an urgent call from a doctor and you come back looking like thunder. I just wondered if she was telling you bad news.”

“Never you mind. Let’s get on with this.”

Murdoch sat in his chair and was rewarded by the stab of pain. He winced.

Olivia noticed. “Eddie said you hurt your back. You should put a mustard poultice on it. And take a purge.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Bagley. Now do you have any news for me?”

She smiled slyly. "As a matter of fact, I do. I went to each depot in turn and started up a good chin with the others in the queue. Lot of walking it was but I will say, it's the first time I've felt stuffed for weeks. And if you ever want to know, the soup they serve at St. Peter's Church is the best."

"Thank you, I'll keep that in mind."

His tone made her a bit huffy. "Just trying to be helpful. Well, anyway, the third time round, I went to the depot just up here on Oak Street. And let me tell you, Mr. Murdoch, I got the sixpence. There was a young woman in front of me, a bit disreputable if you ask me but I did like you said I was to do and engaged her in conversation. 'I was lucky with my Visitor,' says I. 'He coughed up a ticket right away.' 'That so,' says she, 'well you were dead jammy, weren't you.' 'Did yours give you a hard time,' I asks. 'Ha,' says she. 'I just got a new one. The first was tight as pigskin as usual, but this one was willing to give me a ticket all right under certain conditions.' 'What conditions?' asks I. 'You *know* what,' she says, 'I get my docket as long as I — him.' And she used a word I won't sully your ears with repeating but in common parlance it means have intimate connections."

"With the Visitor?"

"Precisely. 'But isn't he a clergyman?' I asks because most of the Visitors are. She laughs like I'd said something very funny. 'Where've you bin all your life, in a manger? Reverends are the worst. And I'm not the first this one has bin after.' 'That isn't right,' says I, which it isn't. 'You *have* been brought up in a manger,' says she. 'It happens all the time. You'd better watch yourself. He'll be after you next. He's not fussy.' I would have gone on talking to her, but we were about to get our soup then and that's all she could see."

Murdoch stared at her. "Did she tell you the man's name?"

"No, the chin went pretty much as I've told it to you."

Olivia looked at him, clearly expecting to be congratulated. Murdoch managed to beam at her.

"Well done indeed, but there's no possibility she was making it up, is there?"

"None. Why'd she tell me something like that if it weren't the truth?"

Ed interrupted. "Some people like to stir up trouble, Livvy. They're in the dirt and they feel they might as well fling some of it around."

"This weren't like that. She let her hair down because she thought we were sisters. As if I've ever. Plunging's one thing, selling yourself for a bit of coal and a loaf of bread is another."

"Have you ever had anything to do with any of the Visitors?" Murdoch asked.

"No." Olivia lifted her shoulders in pride. "We've managed to fend for ourselves, haven't we, Ed?"

"But you were in the workhouse on Tuesday."

"That was an emergency. We didn't get much dosh that day, the weather was too bad, so Ed decided he'd be better off taking a turn in the spike. I begged him not to and I was right. Look at all the trouble it's landed us in."

Parker was about to protest and rekindle what was obviously an ongoing argument. Murdoch tapped his pen on the notebook. "All right, never mind that now. Mrs. Bagley, what did this woman look like?"

"It's hard to say, she had a shawl over her head."

"You've got to do better than that. You said a young woman. About how old? How tall? Was she dark or fair?"

"I just told you, she had a shawl over her head, I didn't see."

Murdoch knew perfectly well that this was Olivia's way of getting her own back. Under protest, she had done what he asked her to, but she wasn't going to make his life easier. For all her protestations, she did see the woman in the queue as one of her own kind. Murdoch wasn't and never would be. He laid his pen beside the notebook and leaned over the desk.

“Mrs. Bagley, your son is probably missing you and you have indicated you miss him. I need to talk to the girl who was telling you this story. I’d like to get a description of her so I can find her. Until your memory gets sharper, Tim is going to have to stay where he is.”

Normally, Murdoch wouldn’t have behaved like a bully but he was tired, hungry, and his back hurt. He’d hardly finished what he was saying when he realized he’d made a mistake. He saw an expression cross Olivia’s face and he knew he now embodied all the tyrannical wardens, police officers, doctors, all those who had power to determine whether she ate or not, whether she had money to live or not, and above all who had rule over her life. She stared back at him with anger in her eyes.

“I’m sure Tim is getting some good grub where he is so I doubt he’s missing his ma that much so I ain’t much worried about him. But you can’t get blood out of a stone, Mr. Detective, no matter how much you stomp on it. I don’t remember anything at all about this woman. Nothing.”

In his own frustration, Murdoch flashed back at her. “Very well. I’m having you taken to the Mercer. Perhaps a little time in solitary confinement will jog your memory. I will talk with you tomorrow.”

Ed gaped at him in dismay. “Begging your pardon, sir, but that don’t seem fair to me. Livvy is doing her best.”

“Is she?” Murdoch knew his voice was too loud. “Let’s put it this way, Mr. Parker. A man, who for all intents and purposes was a thoroughly decent human being, has been brutally murdered. He leaves behind him two young children and his wife is carrying their third child. Last night, a kind old man died. He may have taken his own life, I don’t know for certain, but because of him, three other people lost their lives, one a crippled boy. Another woman is deathly ill and may not live. I met this old man and all he wanted to do was read books. He met Charles Howard, who was also the Visitor for the family that lived upstairs, and is now dead. I

was starting to believe that was purely a coincidence, but I don't like coincidences. Now you're telling me about a woman who claims that one of the esteemed volunteers for the city might be what I would deem a rapist."

There was a silence as they looked at him; Olivia's eyes were dark.

Murdoch made himself calm down. "Perhaps you can understand why I am not feeling much patience with poor memories. I intend to clear up this bloody case if it's the last thing I do."

He leaned his elbows on the desk and rested his head in his hands. To add to his misery, he was developing a throbbing headache. "The woman you met in the queue may be able to help us. I beg you to help me find her."

She sucked in her cheeks, a gesture that added twenty years to her face. "If I cannot remember, there's nothing I can do, is there?"

Murdoch sighed. "So be it." He rubbed at his temples. "Mrs. Bagley, I apologize for trying to threaten you. I should not have done that. I'll have Tim released and you can go home. But you have to report back here in the morning. If you try to scarper, I'll put out a bill for you and you will go to the Mercer for sure whether your son misses you or not. Perhaps something will come to you in a dream."

She shrugged. "I doubt that." She helped Ed to his feet and handed him the crutches. She waved her finger at Murdoch. "If you want to cure your lumbago, you should go home. Take a purgative or some such."

She didn't say "rat poison," but he knew that's what she was thinking.

Chapter Forty

MURDOCH WAS BEGINNING to feel as if he could fall asleep on the spot. He longed to be at home, in bed, with his stomach full of Katie's hot pork chops and potatoes. However, even fatigue couldn't wipe out the pain of his lumbago and there was no comfortable position, sitting hardly better than standing, and walking agony. The only kind of movement that didn't hurt was bicycling and he was glad to get on his wheel and head for Hicks's lodging house, where the two constables were searching. Before he left the station, he instructed Gardiner to give Traveller a good dinner and a pipe of tobacco but not to release him as yet.

"What about the other two toe-rags?"

"If Burley comes back and the Sisters have confirmed their alibi, we'll have to let them go, but don't feed them. And make sure they tell you where they're going next."

He was pedalling slowly along Wilton when he noticed somebody huddled in the doorway of the grocery shop at the corner. Murdoch stopped.

"Alf, what are you doing here?"

The boy looked completely miserable, his nose reddened from the cold.

"Hello, Mr. Williams. I've done my three days at the workhouse and my brother throwed me out so I don't have nowhere to go."

Murdoch cursed under his breath. Gardiner must have turfed Alf out of the jail when Murdoch released him.

"And you have no money for a doss house, I presume?"

"No, sir. Mr. Traveller was going to look after me but I don't know where he is."

Murdoch took out his notebook and began to scribble a note. "Alf, I want you to take this note to the House of Providence. Do you know where that is?"

"No, sir."

"All right, I'll tell you in a minute. When you get there you must ask for Sister Mary Mathilda. Say it to me."

Alf repeated slowly, "Sister Mathilda."

"Give her this note. She'll give you something to eat and she'll find you a bed for the night."

Before Murdoch could stop him, the simpleton jumped up and grabbed his hand and planted a hearty kiss on it.

Murdoch pushed him away gently. "That's enough, Alf. Now put the note in your pocket ... that's it. Off you go. Straight down Parliament Street to Queen Street. Then you turn left. Show me your left, Alf. Good. Just before St. Paul's Church is the street that leads to the House of Providence. You can see it. I'm going to come to the House in the next few days and I will expect a good report."

Alf giggled in real joy. "Can Mr. Traveller come too?"

"Not at the moment. And Alf, Sister Mary Mathilda is a lady, a nun, and you mustn't grab her hand or kiss her without asking. That's not polite."

"No, sir. I won't."

"Get going then. Fast as you can."

Obediently, Alf trotted off and Murdoch watched him to make sure he'd got it right. At the corner, he turned and gave a big exuberant wave as if he was far away and bidding farewell to a longlost friend. Murdoch felt a pang of sorrow. His brother, Bertie, used to stand on the pier and send off the fishing boats with just that exuberance. Most of the fishermen tolerated him, but their father was always irritated. *He looks like a fool. Don't let him act like that.* The chastisement came down heavily on everybody in the family, especially their mother.

Murdoch waved back.

He continued on his way along Wilton to Sherbourne.

Fyfer greeted him at the door to Hicks's room. "We found this in his cupboard, sir. It's his will, written three years ago. There's fifty dollars as well." He handed an envelope to Murdoch. "We've turned his room inside out, sir, and there isn't a trace of a bottle of prussic acid nor a suicide note."

Higgins was shaking out the last of the books in the bookcase.

"Be gentle with those books, constable," said Murdoch. Higgins looked bewildered but began to move a little slower. Murdoch opened the envelope. Inside was a single piece of paper headed.

The last will and testament of Thomas Elijah Hicks. Dated this 20th day of June 1893.

Being of sound mind, I Thomas Hicks do hereby write my last will and testament. I bequeath all of my worldly goods, to wit my books and bookcases to the Toronto Public Library to dispose of as they see fit. My personal effects I donate to St. Stephen's Anglican Church to dispense among those who have need.

My body I bequeath to the Toronto Medical School so that our new young doctors may learn.

I request my burial be simple and that I be buried next to my beloved wife, Emily, who resides in the Mount Pleasant Cemetery. I have left enclosed sufficient money to cover those expenses. My solicitor has a copy of this will. His office is 31 King Street West. Mr. Eric Deacon.

The will was signed and witnessed by two people who gave their occupation as clerk.

The money was a mix of crumpled notes from various banks and of various denominations. In spite of his poverty, Hicks had saved enough money for the burial he wanted.

"Higgins, I want you to take this paper and go to Mr. Deacon. See if this was the last will that Mr. Hicks had drawn up. Find out if he had taken out any insurance policies."

The constable left.

“Let me just show you something, sir,” said Fyfer, and he led the way over to the window. The curtains had been opened when Dr. Ogden did her examination, but Murdoch hadn’t paid a lot of attention.

“This is an old house and the frame is cracked. Somebody has gone to a lot of trouble to seal the window.”

He indicated the newspaper that was stuffed into the gaps around the frame.

Murdoch looked puzzled. “He’s keeping out the drafts. I’ve done that myself.”

Fyfer smiled, happy at his own astuteness. “Look at the date on the newspaper. It’s yesterday’s *Globe*. This was just done. I take that as too much of a coincidence. Man blocks any air, then that same night dies from carbon monoxide poison. It would be easy to dislodge a brick in the chimney and create a block. We all know the danger of burning cheap coke without proper venting. I’d say it’s a clear indication of self-murder.”

Murdoch sighed. “But why do both? Why take prussic acid and also set up carbon monoxide poisoning?”

“There’ll be an insurance policy, mark my words, sir. They’ll pay for an accident, not for suicide.”

“But why haven’t we found the bottle of prussic acid?”

“It must be here somewhere, sir. It wouldn’t just walk away.”

“But it could be carried. What if somebody else gave him the poison?”

“Offered him for his insurance money, you mean?”

“Fyfer, you’ve got insurance on the brain.”

“Sorry, sir. I just took out an indemnity policy myself, maybe that’s why. My parents will do well if I’m run over by a streetcar.”

“Leaving aside the possibility of an unknown person being the beneficiary of the as-yet-unfound insurance policy, somebody could have poisoned him with the prussic acid,

maybe even at his own request, then set it up to seem like a tragic accident with the blocked chimney."

"But why go to all that trouble, unless they stand to gain something? ... Yes, sir, I know what you're going to say but what if the murderer was a friend? What if Mr. Hicks says to that friend, Hey, I'm tired of living without my old lady, will you poison me, because I'm scared to do it myself, but then make it look like an accident so none of my friends will be upset and think the less of me? Was he a papist, do you know, sir?"

"No, I believe he was a Presbyterian. At least he was reading the Psalms, but I suppose he could have been any denomination."

Fyfer was looking a little smug and Murdoch held up his hand. "All right. That theory doesn't hold water. If Hicks wanted to kill himself, he could have easily set up the carbon monoxide poisoning and made it look like an accident. It's the prussic acid that's thrown a wrench in the works. That doesn't make sense. According to Dr. Ogden, the poison acts quickly. Hicks was an old man and she believes he would have gone unconscious almost immediately."

Murdoch was sitting at the table, which was easier on his back. There was a teapot on the table but no cups. Over by the sink, Hicks's few mugs were on their hooks. Murdoch reached over and removed the lid from the teapot. There was some tea left in the bottom. He took a good sniff.

"Damn, I should have checked this before. Have a smell, Fyfer, there's prussic acid in there all right." The constable confirmed his suspicion. "We'll get this to Dr. Ogden right away. So you have to be right about there being a second person. The mug is washed and hung up. Hicks couldn't have done that."

"Whoever it was, friend or foe, wasn't thinking too clearly, were they, sir? They should have emptied out the teapot. Either that or made it blatant and left the bottle in the

cupboard or something. They must have taken it with them."

"As you say, Hicks's guest wasn't thinking clearly. He, or she, must have been distressed at what they were doing."

"They probably thought nobody'd suspect. Criminals don't realize what doctors can find these days when they cut you open. So what do you think, sir? Was it a friend or a foe?"

"It's hard to believe the man was deliberately murdered. If ever a man seemed harmless, Thomas Hicks did."

"So's an anthill until you kick it," said the constable somewhat ambiguously. "Shall I get started on questioning the neighbours, sir? See if anybody noticed anybody coming in."

"Dr. Ogden thought he died about midnight so I assume the second person came about ten o'clock. The German woman who lived upstairs said she heard voices. That's probably who it was. Get some help, Frank. I want every resident on the street interviewed. The usual. Did Hicks quarrel with anybody? What sort of man was he and so on." Murdoch stood up and pressed his hand into the small of his back. "Lock the door, will you, and leave the key at the station. I'm sure his landlord will be wanting to rent out the rooms immediately and I'm not going to let him. I'm going home for a short spell, but if anything of a dramatic nature comes up, come and get me."

"Yes, sir. By the way, I know a good treatment for lumbago."

"Don't tell me, take a purge?"

"That's right, sir. Works wonders. Remember that attack I had last winter when I was shovelling out snow in front of the station? I was bent double, but I took a few Ayers pills and they got me right as rain in no time at all."

"I'll keep it in mind."

Chapter Forty-One

BICYCLING SEEMED TO EASE the spasm in his back and Murdoch was able to dismount and bring his wheel into the house without too much difficulty. He stowed the bicycle in its usual place under the stairs and was about to go up to his room when he noticed a black astrakhan coat and a silk hat hanging on the hall stand. At the same time, he heard the now familiar sound of a foghorn emanating from Amy's room. This was followed by a convincing rendition of a loon calling. Then a burst of man's laughter. She was home early from school. And she had a visitor. The loon sound became a lovely liquid finch song. More laughter and applause. Murdoch stood listening a few moments longer when suddenly the door opened and Amy came out into the hall. Right behind her was a man he had never seen before, a tall, well-dressed fellow whose face was a glow with pleasure. Murdoch felt himself turn scarlet with embarrassment and would have liked to get up the stairs in a hurry but he couldn't. Amy saw him, and to his eyes, she likewise seemed disconcerted.

"Good afternoon, Will. I didn't expect you home so early."

"Nor I you."

"It's a half holiday today."

"Oh yes, I forgot. You did mention that."

The man was still standing behind Amy, eyeing Murdoch with frank curiosity. He leaned toward her and said cozily in her ear, "This must be the famous Mr. Murdoch, the police detective you told me about?"

She stepped away from him. "Yes, that's right. Allow me to introduce you. Will, this is Mr. Roger Bryant-William

Murdoch, my fellow lodger." She smiled. "And my saviour."

"What an enviable position to be in your life, dear Amy," murmured Bryant.

"What I meant was that Will took me into these lodgings when I had nowhere to live." She sounded slightly irritated and Murdoch could feel some tension easing inside his chest. Mr. Roger Bryant might be acting like a masher, but Amy was having none of it. Who the hell was he to be on such familiar terms with her? Murdoch stepped forward to shake hands, but no will power in the world could force his back muscles to release sufficiently for him to stand completely straight.

"Will, what have you done to your back?"

"Touch of lumbago, nothing serious."

"Ah, how unfortunate for you," said Bryant as he shook hands. He was a couple of inches taller than Murdoch, perhaps a little older. He had attractive blue eyes, thick wavy brown hair, and a luxuriant moustache, waxed to fine points on either end. His breath smelled faintly of wine.

Amy turned and removed the hat and coat from the stand and handed them to him.

"My dear, one would almost think you are trying to get me out of here in a hurry," said Bryant.

"You said you had an appointment."

"So I did but it does not have nearly the same appeal as your wonderful lodging house does. Thanks, as you say, to your landlord here."

Murdoch and Amy spoke at virtually the same time.

"Oh, I'm not the -"

"He's not the landlord."

That made them laugh and Mr. Bryant frown. He took Amy's hand and bowed over it. Murdoch was certain he would have kissed her fingers, but she pulled away before he could do so.

"Please think about what I said, Amy. I will await your reply."

He took a gold-topped ebony cane from the stand and with a brusque nod at Murdoch he left.

Amy closed the door emphatically behind him. "Roger's an old acquaintance of mine," she said to Murdoch, who was leaning against the stair wall. Amy bent down and picked something up from the floor. "Oh dear, this is your letter, Will. It slipped off the table. It's from Great Britain. You've been waiting for it, haven't you?"

Murdoch took the letter from her. It seemed distressingly thin.

Amy turned away. "I have to practise some more of my songs for tomorrow. Take care of your lumbago. I'll see you at suppertime."

She headed back to her room.

Murdoch felt as if there was acid in his stomach. She had every right to have visitors, to know men who acted like suitors. She had every right, of course she did. And why wouldn't she be attracted to a man who was handsome and obviously rich. His coat alone would have cost Murdoch two weeks' wages and the gold-topped cane another month's.

Traveller would probably have said, We're just the same as the creatures of the wild. The one with the biggest cock always wins the female .

Appalled he was thinking this way, clutching Enid's letter, Murdoch made his way up the stairs.

On the other hand, Amy hadn't seemed exactly won over by Mr. Bryant in spite of the jollity he'd heard coming from her room.

The dream was one that recurred over and over, only small details changed but the import was always the same, he was trying desperately to rescue his mother or Susanna or Bertie and couldn't. This night's dream was particularly vivid.

He seemed to be in the school dormitory in his hard, narrow bed. It was very dark and although his eyes were open, he couldn't see and he strained desperately to make out the vague shapes around him. He was also finding it impossible to sit up, as if he had no power in his body. He sensed rather than saw that over in the corner of the big room, his mother and sister were both sitting on a bed that resembled one of the flat-topped rocks that jutted out from the beach on the south arm of the cove. They were surrounded by some kind of dangerous sea animals, half seal, half rat, which they were trying to fend off. He had to get to them if only he could move. Bertie was crying, but he didn't know where he was .

Murdoch woke up. He could hear babies wailing and it took him a few moments to come out of his dream and realize it was the twins downstairs. He'd been struggling so hard, he'd almost moved himself off his bed but he was lying on his back and when he tried to sit up, he couldn't move without a shooting pain up his spine. Slowly, there that's it, roll to one side, now push. Argh. He was sitting straight up at least, his feet dangling over the side of the bed.

From downstairs, the wails lessened. One of the twins at least had stopped crying. Katie was probably feeding him. In a moment the other quieted down. Murdoch could make out a murmur of voices, then the sound of the door opening and closing. Amy was leaving for school. With an effort and another moan, he stood up and shuffled to the washstand. She hadn't come into the kitchen for supper last night, and Katie told him she'd said she had a headache and was going to eat in her room. Seymour had gone out for one of his regular meetings and even Katie, who loved to sit with him and chat, had pleaded exhaustion and gone to bed so he had eaten alone. He was pretty tired himself, but when he managed to get upstairs and into bed, sleep had eluded him as it so often did. He'd read Enid's brief letter through again.

She'd begun by saying, "I might not have occasion to write for a long time ..." and the words were seared in his mind. Her father was about the same as he had been, the weather was damp, she'd had a cold. Then in her last paragraph, she said that "an old family friend" had come to visit, the man, now a widower who "got along just wonderfully with Alwyn." That was a particularly sharp stab, considering how long it had taken Murdoch to win the boy's affections. All these "old acquaintances" were getting under his skin. Enid's letter was friendly enough, but the tone was as cool as a cucumber, as if he, Murdoch, were the old acquaintance, not a man who had been her lover. Only at the end of the letter had she said anything truly personal. "Think of me sometimes, Will." He glanced over at the lovely ormolu clock on the mantelpiece that she had given him just before she left. "At least I can be sure you will be reminded of me from time to time."

Damn. He felt both guilty and irritated at her timidity. He had cared for her deeply and even now the memory of the lovemaking they'd experienced stirred him. She was the first woman he'd ever had intimate connection with. He'd loved Liza passionately but both of them had believed in the sanctity of marriage and the love was not consummated.

"The grave's a fine and private place, But none, I think, do there embrace."

Liza had encouraged him to read poetry, although it wasn't quite to his taste. Like Mr. Hicks, he preferred rollicking adventure stories. But one day, he'd come across Marvell's poem when he was browsing through some of the poetry collections at the library and he'd rushed home to read it to her. Oh God, when was that? June probably, he remembered it was a lovely sunny evening and Liza was wearing a light summer dress. She listened seriously to the poem and laughed. "You can praise my bosom as long as you like, Will," but then she kissed away his scowl with a

frustrating passion. "We'll be married soon." But they weren't married soon, or ever would be.

"None I think do there embrace."

He poured water from the pitcher into the bowl on the washstand. He'd expected the water to be cold, but it was lukewarm and he smiled. Dear Katie must have crept into his room with a jug of hot water, expecting he would be waking soon. He was later than usual, but he was finding it hard to move fast. He couldn't be bothered to sharpen his razor and paid the price by nicking himself on the chin. Blood coloured the water immediately and he dabbed at the wound with the towel. Another damn.

He hadn't read Marvell's poem to Enid. She was not playing the coy mistress with him. The opposite. She had made it clear she wanted to be his wife. It was he who was holding back.

Serves you right then, he said to himself. Why should she wait for you? Now she's probably being courted by the old family friend who has conveniently lost his wife, that, thank goodness, Alwyn, who as we all know is very particular, actually likes.

He sponged himself down as best he could and dried off. The room was cold, the fire in the hearth long burned out, and he tried to hurry. He got into his undershirt all right, but his trousers were a problem and he had to shuffle from one foot to the other before he could get them on. He'd been so intent on that struggle, he hadn't heard the knocking on the front door, but as he was wrestling with his socks, there were footsteps on the stairs and a light tap on his door. Katie said softly, "Mr. Murdoch, there's somebody here to see you."

He opened the door. "Is it Constable Crabtree?"

Katie turned a little pink at seeing him half-clothed. "No, Mr. Murdoch. It's a lady. She is most apologetic about coming here at this hour, but she says it's urgent. Here's her card."

Murdoch took the calling card and read, *Miss Sarah Dignam*.

"Good Lord! Show her into the parlour, will you, Katie? Tell her I'll be right down."

"Shall I make tea?"

"Yes, indeed and toast too if you don't mind. With lots of butter."

He returned to his room and pulled on his shirt. The celluloid collar of the shirt was stiff and as he fumbled with the button, some of the blood from his chin transferred to the edge of the collar. Damn and blast to that. Hurriedly, he knotted his tie and put on his jacket, which fortunately hid the blood spot. Bending over to tie up his shoelaces was almost impossible and required contortions he didn't know he could ever repeat. He felt as if he were taking so long, he half expected Miss Dignam, who had taken such an unorthodox step as to call on him at his lodgings, to be coming upstairs to greet him. Fortunately, she was contained enough to be still waiting in the front parlour. Katie had brought in the tea and a rack of toast, but Miss Dignam was sitting motionless in the chair. Like Mrs. Howard, she looked as if she hadn't slept and she too seemed to have aged. However, in spite of her pallor and the deep lines etched around her eyes and mouth, she retained the vestiges of a sweet prettiness, now fragile and desiccated as a pressed flower. The short blue cape she was wearing accentuated her blue eyes.

"Miss Dignam, I'm so sorry to keep you waiting."

"No please, it is I who should apologize for coming at such an early hour and to your own lodgings. I first went to the police station, but the sergeant said you had not arrived and I managed to get out of him where you lived so I came here directly."

The strangeness of the visit couldn't totally distract Murdoch from the hunger pangs in his stomach and he indicated the tea trolley.

"May I offer you some tea and toast."

"No, thank you." She must have noticed his yearning glance at the teapot because she said, "Please, have your breakfast. I have waited this long, a few more minutes won't make that much difference."

Murdoch poured himself a cup of tea, added milk and sugar lumps, and took a piece of the toast. Miss Dignam sat staring into the fire, which was just getting going in the hearth. She looked so grey and sombre that he paused for a moment. Good God, had she come to confess to the murder of Charles Howard? He put down the toast, uneaten.

"I'm ready now, ma'am. Why is it you wanted to see me?"

"Mr. Murdoch, I have done nothing but pray to our Lord for guidance ever since this tragedy happened. I am aware that what I did was against the law and I am quite prepared to take my punishment." She reached into her jet-beaded reticule and he thought she was looking for a handkerchief but in fact she removed an envelope, which she handed to him. "I have not told you the complete truth on two counts, Mr. Murdoch. I hope you will understand and forgive me when I explain why. There is something in the envelope that you should see."

Murdoch opened the flap. Inside was a piece of paper that had smudges of brownish red on the edges that he recognized as blood stains. He unfolded the letter.

To the board of directors.

It is with a heavy heart that I write this letter. I wish I was not privy to the information I have just now received which I must impart to you

The letter stopped with a sharp upward zig of the *u*.

"Where did you get this, Miss Dignam?"

"I took it from Mr. Howard's desk when I found him."

"Why did you do that, ma'am?"

She didn't answer, only clasping her hands more tightly together. Murdoch was aware that in the adjoining kitchen,

Katie had started to sing to the twins. Miss Dignam raised her head and listened for a moment and an expression of intense loneliness crossed her face. Hearing the lullabies sometimes affected Murdoch the same way.

“Ma’am? You didn’t answer my question. Why did you take the letter?”

His voice was by no means sharp, but she shrank back into the chair. “When you first came to talk to me, Mr. Murdoch, I had the impression that you are a kind man and I must trust that impression now because what I am about to tell you could easily invite your ridicule and contempt and frankly, I would find that hard to bear.” Finally, she met his eyes. “You see, Mr. Murdoch, what I have to tell you is that Charles Howard and I loved each other.”

All he could think of was Louisa Howard’s angry words: *Poor Charles, she was driving him to distraction*.

Miss Dignam didn’t seem insane. She was speaking calmly, not weeping, and the only sign of emotion was a slight flush on her thin cheeks and a brightness to her eyes. “Let me explain,” she continued. “When Charles was chosen as our new pastor, he was not the unanimous choice. Our previous pastor was a conservative man who died as he had lived, without much reverberation. Some of us had been hoping for a minister who might bring new vigour to the church and Charles was such a man. He was well travelled and urbane and had actually experienced the battle of Khartoum, as a civilian, you understand, not a soldier. He had many stories to share with us and he brought exactly the breath of life we needed.” She paused. “My throat is a little dry, Mr. Murdoch, perhaps I will have a cup of tea after all.”

He poured the tea and waited while she sipped at it. He didn’t know where all this was leading, but he knew he must be patient. And there was something about this little wan woman that tugged at his heart.

She replaced her cup on the trolley. "It fairly soon became apparent to me that Charles was developing special feelings for me. His wife is a good woman but, I regret to say, rather shallow and far too caught up in the prestige of her position as a pastor's wife. I say that only to you, of course. May Flowers shares my view, but that is all we have shared. I do not gossip, Mr. Murdoch. I never told Miss Flowers what was happening between Charles and me. I did not know how we were going to resolve our dilemma, but I trusted he would find a way and on Monday, by certain signals that he sent me, I knew he was going to openly declare his love."

"What were these signals, Miss Dignam?"

Unexpectedly, there was a flash of fire in her eyes and her voice was stronger. "I know what you're thinking, Mr. Murdoch. How could a woman such as I, no longer in her youth, be an object of attraction to a man in his prime? A man who is already married? I myself doubted it many times, but finally I was convinced. The signs? A woman knows these things. They were in his special smiles to me, the way he would touch my hand when we parted, the expression on his face when he thanked me for my little gifts but especially the way he was in our prayer meetings." She smiled slightly, remembering. "There are some things that transcend differences of age or station. Ours was a meeting of minds, an excitement created by the awareness of mutual understanding that was shared by no other woman."

Staring at him with eyes that would put a puppy to shame

"You asked me earlier why I had taken the letter from Charles's desk ... I did so because I thought it might have something to do with us and our dilemma."

"You thought he might be writing a letter to his wife?"

"I glimpsed the first few words and that is what I assumed. Perhaps I have not made myself clear, Mr. Murdoch. Charles had asked me to comment on the text for that Monday."

She paused again and Murdoch could see how hard she was struggling for control. "You see, this was his way of signalling to me his intention."

"I'm afraid I don't understand, Miss Dignam."

There was a flicker of impatience across her face. "No, of course not, how could you understand? The text in question that Charles asked me to study was from the Song of Songs, chapter eight, verse six; 'Set me as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave...' You see, Mr. Murdoch, Charles was about to discuss how we could realize our love publicly and somebody has made sure that wouldn't happen."

Chapter Forty-Two

MURDOCH REMAINED WITH MISS DIGNAM for another half an hour, during which time, seemingly relieved at having unburdened herself of the secret, she wept ceaselessly. However, when he pressed her to say more about what she had insinuated, she became shifty. "He was the soul of discretion, but I cannot say with complete certainty that his wife was oblivious."

Half the parish knew. She was making quite a fool of herself.

Finally, Murdoch escorted her home where he left her to the untender mercies of her friend Miss Flowers, who appeared to be staying at the house. He didn't know what to make of her statement, whether to believe her. On the surface, it wasn't likely, but then he hadn't known Reverend Howard. Perhaps the intellectual compatibility she was convinced they shared had been seductive. On the other hand, what if she had expected Howard to declare his love? According to Mrs. Howard, he was going to declare the exact opposite. Had that driven Miss Dignam into a kind of madness? She didn't strike him as cunning, but what if her madness took the form of a sort of amnesia? What if she had killed Howard and now didn't remember? Fyfer had said she was covered in blood when he saw her. Her explanation for that was plausible, but what if there was a more sinister reason? The attack had been vicious and it was hard to see Miss Dignam capable of it. Murdoch ran his fingers through his hair. While he was on the subject of sinister, could he believe the newly widowed Mrs. Howard? Her murdering her own husband also seemed most unlikely, but as Miss

Dignam had quoted to him, "jealousy is cold as the grave." And many a time he'd heard the Christian Brothers warning their young charges about trifling with a woman's affections. "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned." Murdoch, shy and awkward around the few young women he did meet, had been rather afraid of that possibility and vowed to deal honourably with any woman he might encounter as an adult. He winced at that thought, still not at all sure he was behaving honourably toward Enid Jones. On the other hand, jealousy was a powerful emotion, as he knew all too well, that could take over a man or a woman, and he was beginning to wonder if the green-eyed monster wasn't somehow at the centre of this murder.

He parked his wheel in the stable that adjoined the station, enjoying for a moment the warmth and smell of the old white horse, Captain, who was standing, already partly harnessed in case he was needed to pull the police ambulance. There had been complaints from the drivers that the horse was getting too old and slow for his job, and Murdoch knew it wouldn't be long before he was dispatched to the knackers. He gave him a quick pat on his wide rump, glad he was ignorant of his fate and left him to munch on his hay.

When he entered the hall, Murdoch found a sleepy and sullen-looking pair of queer plungers waiting for him. Damn, he'd forgotten he'd told them to come first thing and he was much later than usual.

"Good morning, folks. I'll be right with you," he called out a cheery greeting and went to hang up his coat and hat on the peg by the door.

Charlie Seymour was at his desk and he came right over. "Bettles and Kearney are confirmed to be at the House of Providence on Tuesday. The admitting Sister says they were there on Monday night and didn't leave until close to five on Tuesday. The nuns didn't want them to stay any longer. She says they are malcontents."

"How certain is she of the time when they left?"

"Very certain, apparently. She had to get a porter to escort them out just before the new applicants were admitted at five o'clock."

"Howard was dead by three-thirty that afternoon so unfortunately that means those two bits of scum are in the clear."

"Shall I let them go then?"

"Wait until I've got Olivia and Parker in the duty room. No point in them being seen as narks. Bettles is the type who will take any excuse to throw his weight around. How's Traveller doing?"

"He's been pretty quiet except for singing sea shanties at six o'clock this morning. He says he thought we needed livening up."

Murdoch grinned. Traveller had taken his advice.

"I'm going to talk to these two first, then you can bring him in." Murdoch eased himself up.

"How's your lumbago?" asked Charlie.

"About the same."

"Did you speak to Amy or Katie? They'll probably have some suggestions for what to do."

"I'm sure they will, everybody does, but no, I didn't see either of them at supper so I haven't had the benefit of their feminine wisdom."

Seymour gave him a searching sort of look. This wasn't the place to go into it, but Murdoch was burning to know what Charlie knew about a certain Mr. Roger Bryant, rich man.

Murdoch beckoned to Olivia and Ed to follow him and they went down the hall to the duty room. There was more room in here than in his cubicle and as it was between shifts for the constables, they wouldn't be disturbed.

"Sit down, please. Ed, how's your ankle?"

"Better, thank you, sir. Somebody gave me a nickel this morning."

“Ed!” exclaimed Olivia warningly.

“I weren’t doing nothing wrong. I was just standing there waiting to cross the road and I took my hat off to wipe my brow and before I knew it a kindly lady had dropped me a coin.”

Murdoch chuckled. “Before you know it, kindly ladies will have paid your rent. You’ll be able to milk that injury for a long time.”

“Frankly, sir, I can’t earn near as much just acting like a cripple as I can plunging. I think folks like the excitement of plunging.”

Murdoch took the big blackened kettle off the hob and poured more hot water into the teapot. The constables waited a long time before they emptied out the pot and it was already half full with tea leaves.

“Do you want some tea?” he asked.

Ed was about to say yes but Olivia got there first.

“No, thank you. We’ve already had our breakfast.”

She was very cool this morning and Murdoch knew he was still in her bad books.

He poured three mugs of tea anyway. “Mrs. Bagley, I’m sorry I was rude to you yesterday. It was uncalled for.”

She stared at him in surprise. “Well ... apology accepted. You’re just doing your job, I expect.”

“You’ve been very helpful, both of you. I was frustrated with my own lack of progress.”

Both Ed and Olivia reached out and took a mug of tea. Wordlessly, Murdoch offered them milk and sugar. He filled up his own mug and for a moment, there was silence in the room, broken only by the clink of the spoons. Ed smacked his lips.

“Now that’s what I call a good cuppa. It’d take the blacking off the stove.”

Olivia gulped down the tea in a way that told Murdoch she had lied about having breakfast.

"I did think some more about what you said, yesterday," she said. "I can't promise you that I remember a lot more than I already told you, but some things did come back."

Murdoch smiled appreciatively and nodded at her to continue.

"The woman was young. Younger than me by five years at least, about my height and she had a plaid shawl over her head. And a brown or black skirt. She was lathy, but then all the paupers get that way, don't they?"

Murdoch sighed. He knew Olivia was telling him the truth, but it wasn't much to go on. There were likely several young, thin girls of medium height in the pauper queue and most of them would be wearing plaid shawls and dark skirts.

"Would you recognize her again?"

Olivia frowned. "Hmm. I might if I was close up."

"Would you go back to the House with me and see if we can find her? They open the gates for the soup at noon, don't they?"

Olivia shrugged. "I'll go on one condition. You'll have to put your old clothes on again. They'll all know you for a frog and I don't want to be seen as some kind of nark."

Murdoch groaned. "You don't know what you're asking. I haven't stopped scratching."

They both grinned at him. "You'll get hardened to it," said Ed.

"Where are your duds, then?" Olivia asked.

"I asked the sergeant to burn them."

"That's a waste. There was still some use in those clothes."

"Tell you what," said Ed. "I can't stand in no queue with this ankle. We're about the same size, why don't we do a swap? You take my hat and coat at least."

Murdoch didn't want to be impolite, but Ed was a good six inches shorter than he was and the coat and hat in question were decidedly on the seedy side. But he had no choice.

"Thanks, Ed."

"You'll look good as a detective, Eddie," said Olivia.

Murdoch checked the clock above the fireplace. "It's almost eleven o'clock. How far away is your boarding house?"

"We're out on Queen Street in the country."

"Too far to go there and back." Murdoch reached for his notebook. "There's a butcher shop just down from here on Parliament." He scribbled a note, tore out the page, and handed it to Olivia. "The owner's name is Mr. Davies. Give him this and he'll make sure you have one of his best sausage rolls." The look he caught in her eyes confirmed his first suspicion. They hadn't had the money to buy breakfast. "Come back by half past eleven and we'll go to the depot."

"Can I have another splash of char before we go?" Olivia shoved her mug across the table and Murdoch poured her some tea that was by now soot black.

When they'd finished, he walked with them to the front doors and they left both livened by the prospect of further adventures and sausage rolls. Murdoch was about to return to his own cubicle when the telephone rang. Callahan answered and waved at Murdoch to indicate the call was for him. He picked up the receiver.

It was Dr. Ogden. "Detective Murdoch, I have just finished my post-mortem examination of the Tugwell women. I thought you'd like to know the results right away. The older woman was in poor condition with signs of early consumption. Her daughter had gonorrhea."

"I see. And that would mean that any of her most recent er, customers, would have contracted it?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And Mr. Howard showed no signs of the disease?"

"Of course not. Did you expect him to?"

"Not necessarily. I'm just making sure I have all the facts."

Her voice on the other end of the telephone sounded cold. "Charles Howard was a respectable man of God. You forget I

knew him. I cannot for the life of me imagine he would consort with a prostitute."

Once again, her tone of voice grated on his nerves. "It's surprising how many men conceal dark secrets, doctor."

"You don't need to remind me of that, Mr. Murdoch. I have seen too many of their innocent victims, their wives, in my consulting rooms."

"Quite so." Murdoch signalled to Callahan to pull over the stool for him. "Dr. Ogden, I wonder if I could get your opinion on another matter concerning Charles Howard."

"I can only spare you five minutes. I must get to my surgery."

Murdoch eased himself onto the stool and turned away so that the constable couldn't hear him. As succinctly as possible he related Miss Dignam's story.

The doctor actually guffawed. "Good Lord, the woman is delusional. She'll get herself committed to the lunatic asylum if she goes on like that."

"So you don't think it's likely that Reverend Howard was in love with her?"

"Utterly out of the question. Charles was always amiable to the women of the congregation. Who knows, perhaps he was a little excessive, but the fact is, he adored his wife. You haven't seen Louisa Howard at her best, Mr. Murdoch, but to say that he would choose Sarah Dignam over her is absurd. What man would willingly reach for a withered winter apple when he could have a ripe plum?"

Her tone was scornful and Murdoch felt a brief pang of guilt on behalf of the male half of the population. "Is there anything else, detective? I really must hurry."

"No, thank you, ma'am. I won't keep you any longer."

They hung up and Murdoch handed the telephone back to Callahan.

He walked over to the desk.

"Charlie, tell me something honestly. If given the choice between a shrivelled-up apple and a lush plum, which would

you take?"

Seymour looked at him in bewilderment. "Is this a trick question?"

"No, well sort of. Which would you choose?"

"Neither. Plums give me the stomachache and an old apple isn't worth it. I'd go for a pear. I like pears."

"Thanks, Charlie. I'm going back to my office for a while. There's been a new development in the Howard case. Come down as soon as the patrol sergeant relieves you and I'll fill you in."

Murdoch returned to his cubicle and sat down at his desk. He knew what his answer would be to the doctor's question and he pitied the woman who had given her heart so completely to a man who, it would seem, was doing no more than his job called for.

Chapter Forty-Three

MURDOCH TOOK OUT his magnifying glass and began to examine the letter Miss Dignam had brought him. The writing was scrawled as if in haste and there were two or three blots on the copy. Unless Reverend Howard was habitually in a hurry, the letter seemed to indicate urgency. Murdoch knew that many people made fair copies of their letters once they'd composed them. He'd done that himself with important letters. Was there another copy of this letter that was complete? According to Doris, she hadn't mailed anything that morning and Sarah Dignam had said this was on Howard's desk. The only copy then and obviously interrupted. Murdoch studied the letters again. There was a dot after the last word, not a full stop, this was higher up. Murdoch took out a piece of paper from his desk drawer and started to write.

My name is William Murdoch .

Then he paused as if to think about his next word and his pen remained in the air. He wrote the words again but this time pretended to hear something outside. Sure enough, he found he had rested his pen on the paper, leaving a small dot. Thin evidence maybe but likely indicating Howard had been interrupted rather than stopped on his own volition. What was the information, *just now received* , that caused him such distress and that he dearly wished he didn't know. *A heavy heart* . Suggested sorrow, disappointment. *I dearly wish I was not privy to the information* implied a confidence bestowed. *I must impart to you* was quite formal and suggested he was addressing some kind of authority. Did it concern the applications for charity? Had he been told

somebody was cheating? That was not unlikely, but the language was too severe surely for what was such a common human failing. What people had said about Howard didn't seem to reflect a dour man of no compassion, quite the opposite. Given what Olivia had just told him, Murdoch had a strong suspicion he knew what Howard had learned.

Murdoch tried to put himself in the pastor's skin. His wife said that their luncheon together had been completely normal. He had not seemed distressed or preoccupied and as far as she knew he had no appointments. Assuming that was the case and Howard was not a master of deception, something had occurred to upset him after he arrived at his office. There was no post delivery so it couldn't have been a letter. His book open on the chair suggested he had been interrupted but, at that point, peacefully. What if somebody came to see him who confided in him some news that distressed him in the extreme? Howard had then begun his letter, which he never finished. He had been killed as he sat at his desk writing it. There were two possibilities. First, he had a visitor who gave him distressing news but who then left. Howard started to write his letter and was interrupted a second time by somebody he either knew or certainly didn't fear. That person stabbed him, reasons unknown. Perhaps connected to the letter, perhaps not. The second possibility was that the first visitor and his killer were one and the same. They either left and came back or were still in the room when Howard started to write his letter. What if the pastor had threatened to betray the secret revealed to him and his assailant silenced him forever. On the other hand, the disturbing information of course was not necessarily the reason for the murder. The two events could be coincidental and Howard could have been killed by a tramp, probably Traveller, as everybody wanted to believe.

Murdoch was about to get up and put the letter in the filing cabinet when he heard rapid footsteps coming down the hall toward his cubicle. He didn't need the bellow of

Brackenreid's "Murdoch!" to guess who was coming to see him. He braced himself. The inspector never visited Murdoch's tiny office unless he was so irate he couldn't wait to send for Murdoch to come upstairs.

Brackenreid thrust aside the reed strips that served as a door to the cubicle. Murdoch took one look at his flushed face and knew the inspector was suffering from the painful aftermath of overindulgence, a situation that was becoming more and more frequent of late. A rant was about to be delivered.

"Murdoch, you were supposed to report to me first thing this morning regarding the Howard case. Why haven't I heard from you?"

"The case isn't closed yet, sir."

"I understand you've arrested a tramp who had Howard's watch in his possession. What more do you want?"

"I haven't arrested him as yet. I'm keeping him here for further questioning. He swears he found the watch and at the moment I don't believe we have sufficient evidence to charge him. There are some puzzling aspects of the case that I would like to be sure of before I do so."

"Puzzling aspects? Puzzling aspects? It's you who are the puzzle, Murdoch. A tramp was seen going into the church on Tuesday afternoon -"

"Beg pardon, sir. He was seen crossing the Gardens, not entering the church."

"Nonsense. It's obvious that's where he was heading. He went in, found Howard in his office, and demanded money. The pastor refused him and in a fit of fury he stabbed him and kicked him to death. He then stole the poor man's watch and boots. He has been found with the watch in his possession. What the hell is puzzling about that, Murdoch?"

Murdoch bit his lip. It was certainly plausible, countered only by his own misgivings and a feeling he had about Jack Trevelyan. Really, he should show Brackenreid the letter.

“Sir, give me another day and I promise I will hand you a full report.”

“Give me an arrest, Murdoch, that’s what I want and we can both rest easy.”

Suddenly, Brackenreid’s attention was caught by the poster on the wall announcing last summer’s police games. Murdoch had put it up there because he placed second in the fiercely competitive bicycle race. Whether it was the memory of his detective’s success over their rival stations or whether the inspector’s ire had been sufficiently vented, Murdoch didn’t know, but Brackenreid actually softened.

“You have until tomorrow morning, Murdoch.”

Then he looked up as if he was about to salute the portrait of Her Majesty Queen Victoria and left, the reed strips swaying and clacking in his wake.

Murdoch took a deep breath. He had a lot to do. Walking was out of the question and in spite of a sleety rain that stung his face, he retrieved his bicycle and pedalled over to Carlton Street.

Drummond was standing at his doorway looking out onto the deserted street.

“Don’t tell me you ate all that oatmeal already?” he greeted Murdoch.

“No, I’m here for a different reason.” Murdoch leaned his wheel against the curb and came over to the shopkeeper.

“I’d like to have a serious word, Mr. Drummond. Can we go inside?”

Drummond looked as if he might refuse but changed his mind and reluctantly stepped back and led the way into the shop, which was even more barren than before.

“What do you want?” he asked, his voice belligerent.

Murdoch felt like answering that he’d like to give him a good shaking, but he kept his voice as polite as he could manage.

“When I was here last time, I realized you have a very good view of the church from your store.”

“What of it? It’s free, ain’t it?”

“I get the feeling you spend a lot of time observing the comings and goings along the street.”

“What if I do? Is that against the law?”

Murdoch bit his lip. A quick slap across the man’s head wasn’t going to help matters and Drummond was much older than he was, after all. “I believe that Reverend Howard had a visitor shortly before he was murdered, and I wonder if you, yourself, saw anybody enter the side door that afternoon about one-thirty or so?”

“What if I did?”

“It’s not against the law, Mr. Drummond, but shall we say the law would be served if you do have information you haven’t yet given me.”

“She wouldna have been the murderer, you can be sure of that.”

“Who is the ‘she’ you are referring to?”

Drummond knew he’d slipped and he actually appeared nervous. He rocked back and forth on his heels for a moment, then swirled around, started to fiddle with the few potatoes, moving them around in the bin. He didn’t say anything for several moments and Murdoch began to wonder if he should charge the old pizzle with obstructing the course of justice and take him to the station. Drummond must have read his mind because he said, “I did happen to glance out on the street just as a woman was going by. I saw her enter the church.”

Murdoch took out his notebook. “What time was this and what did she look like?”

“It was quarter past one. The church bell had just chimed. As for what she looked like, I didn’t pay much heed. She weren’t that posh. Maybe a black or dark brown coat.”

“Did you notice this woman come out?”

“I did. She was in there about half an hour. She walked back the same way she’d come and turned down on Sherbourne Street.”

"And you didn't see anybody after that?"

"Not a soul. The tramp would have entered the church from the front. I didn't know anything had happened until I heard all the commotion. The constable set off the alarm bell and you can hear that blasted thing for miles."

"Why didn't you come forward as a witness at the inquest, Mr. Drummond?"

"It slipped my mind. It wasn't important."

"That was for me to decide."

Drummond grimaced. "Women were always calling on him. Oh the ladies loved our pastor, they did. As if a handsome set of whiskers has anything to do with the Lord. This one was all dressed up in her Sunday best. Her hat was a joke with purple feathers five feet high at least."

Murdoch frowned. "Was she a young woman?"

"Not her. Mutton dressed as lamb, she was, with her fancy fur collar and that ridiculous hat."

"She was wearing a fur collar?"

"That's right. It looked like a dead squirrel had fallen on her shoulders."

"And you're sure she'd turned down onto Sherbourne Street?"

"That's what I said, didn't I?" He raised his grizzled eyebrows in a ferocious leer. "Mebbe our good pastor had given her one of his uplifting chats because she was walking much faster on the way back." He shoved one of the potatoes against the bin wall as if it were a bowling ball.

"You didn't like Reverend Howard, did you?"

Drummond's glance slid away and he shrugged. "I could deny it, but there's dozens who'd tell you otherwise. Besides, I don't hold with slyness and namby-pamby characters masquerading as good Christian souls."

"Is that how you saw Howard? A phony?"

"I told you already we didn't agree on the direction our church should take. To my mind, he came in under false pretences, then as soon as he was here, he started to show

his true colours.” Drummond touched his forefinger to the side of his nose and lowered his voice to a conspiratorial tone. “He had certain leanings, if you know what I mean. You mark my words he would have had us all worshipping graven images like the papists do.”

Murdoch closed his notebook with a snap. “Thank you, Mr. Drummond. I will be calling on you again, seeing that you deliberately withheld important information.”

“You kenna prove it was deliberate. People forget, you know.”

Murdoch headed out of the door to his bicycle, Drummond trotting after him.

“Who was she? I didn’t know it was important. What are you going to do? Detective, answer me!”

Chapter Forty-Four

MURDOCH WAS STILL FUMING when he arrived at the lodging house on Sherbourne Street. Constable second class Whiteside scrambled to his feet, literally caught napping as Murdoch entered.

“Good morning, sir.”

“I want to check something in the upstairs room, constable. You can stay where you are.”

The poor lad looked disappointed and Murdoch sympathized. It must be excruciatingly boring to spend your shift sitting outside a door in an empty house.

The Tugwells’ room was unlocked and he went inside. The window sash was still up and the room was cold and damp. He went straight to the wardrobe in the corner of the room. There wasn’t much inside. A pair of boy’s trousers, a shabby brown coat, and two dark-coloured dresses, a jacket of tatty navy wool that he had seen Josie wearing. On the upper rack were two hats, one was the gaudy red plush that Josie was wearing when he first met her, the other a black felt with long purple feathers, which she had worn to the inquest. Murdoch guessed this hat might be considered the family’s Sunday best. Josie wears it to an inquest, Esther to call on the pastor. On the second rack of the wardrobe, curled like a little moribund animal, was a fur neckpiece.

Murdoch looked around the cramped room where the entire Tugwell family had lived. Wooden crates served as cupboards for their few possessions and the bedcovers were bleached sacking. Already the place was gathering dust, but he had the feeling that normally Esther kept it as clean as she could. There was a washstand by the window and two

chipped mugs had been set to drain dry on one of the crates. He went to the fireplace. The coal shuttle was almost empty. On the mantelpiece in pride of place was a photograph, a family portrait taken when the family had known better days. Mr. Tugwell sat on a chair, a child on his knee whose face was slightly blurred as if he hadn't been able to sit still long enough for the photographer to snap the picture. Behind was a pretty, young Josie and Esther, fuller of face, smiling at a hopeful future. Murdoch determined he'd try to find some relatives at least who would honour these few possessions and dispose of them rather than letting the rag-and-bone man come and pick them over.

He said a prayer for the poor souls who had died here, then hurried downstairs to the constable.

"Unlock the door, if you please. Come in with me and bring that candle."

The hall where the constable had been sitting was gloomy and he'd lit the wall sconce.

Once inside, Murdoch went directly over to the hearth. "Constable, I'm having a hard time bending down. Will you take a careful look at the floor right about here? Is there anything you see? Use the candle, it's dark in here."

Whiteside crouched down close to the floor and wiped his fingers on the threadbare carpet.

"Just bits of plaster, sir." He glanced up at the ceiling. "Looks as if they came from up there."

Murdoch strained to look up. All of the ceiling was cracked and chipped but here, just to the right of the chimney, there was a fairly large piece of plaster broken off. The lathes of the floor in the room above were visible. No wonder the carbonic monoxide gas had infiltrated the Tugwell room.

That had been the point.

When he walked into the station, Seymour beckoned to him.

"Our tramp friend is insisting he talk to you. He refused to

say a word to me, but I'm thinking he's ready to make a confession."

"I don't know about that, Charlie. I've made a discovery. You know we kept saying, Who would want to kill old man Hicks? Well I'm sure now he was just unfortunate. The intended victims were the Tugwells. The murderer was diabolical. He knew that by creating carbon monoxide in Hicks's chimney, the gas would drift up to the next floor. He must have given Hicks prussic acid to make him unconscious so he could block the chimney and stuff the windows. Then he used a broom handle to aggravate a missing patch of plaster in the ceiling and left the rest to fate."

"My God, but same question, why kill them?"

"I believe Mrs. Tugwell went to visit Howard shortly before he died. I think she may have told him something incriminating about somebody, God knows who, or exactly what, at this point but I'm starting to guess. The *what* part anyway. Josie Tugwell was on the game. Perhaps her mother told the pastor about Josie's customers." He took Howard's letter out of his pocket. "Miss Dignam took this from the pastor's desk, but for her own convoluted reasons that I'll tell you about later, she didn't admit to it until this morning when she brought it to me. It's not addressed to anybody and it's not finished, but listen to this: 'It is with heavy heart that I write this letter. I wish I was not privy to the information I have just now received which I must impart to you.' What does that sound like to you, Charlie?"

"If, as you say, Esther Tugwell came to confide in him, she wasn't talking about some piece of gutter slime who dipped his wick when he could, but somebody respectable, somebody known."

"Exactly. And I'm wondering if that same pillar of society came to the office while Howard was writing his letter. There

could have been a big confrontation and the selfsame respectable cove killed him.”

Seymour whistled through his teeth. “My goodness. This is a new turn of events. So you don’t suspect our man, Trevelyan, at the moment?”

“I’m ruling out nothing. Let’s see what he has to say, shall we? I’ll pay him a visit.” He headed for the cells at the rear of the station. “Keep an ear out will you, Charlie? If I yell, come quick.”

Murdoch slipped aside the peep-hole cover in the cell door. Traveller was lying on his back on the hard, narrow bed, his eyes closed. Murdoch unlocked the door and went in. The tramp was alert instantly and he rolled over and propped himself on his elbow.

“Mr. Murdoch, ye’re a busy man. I asked to talk to you an hour ago.”

“Forgive me for not coming running, I was investigating the case.”

“And what did you find then? The mayor committed the crime? Or maybe it was Reverend Power wanting to get rid of the non-believer?”

Murdoch was in no mood for jokes and he felt irritated. “What did you want to talk to me about, Mr. Trevelyan?”

“Oh, it’s Mr. Trevelyan, is it? I thought we’d progressed to Christian names at least. I was going to call you Willie and you can certainly call me Jack if you like. Or even Traveller, which I prefer.”

He was grinning in a good-humoured way and Murdoch shrugged. There were two beds in the cell and he perched on the opposite one.

“Do you have some baccy?” Trevelyan asked him. “I’d fain give my soul to the devil for a pipe of good black Durham.”

“Here.” Murdoch fished out his own pipe and tobacco pouch and handed it to him. He waited until the tramp had

lit up and taken a deep, grateful pull. The tiny cell was filled with pungent smoke.

"There's some people coming to see me in about half an hour, Traveller, so I'd be glad if you'd get a move on."

Traveller eyed him shrewdly and beamed his gap-toothed smile. "I'm getting more and more the sense that you ain't got me on your hanging list. Am I right?"

"I'm not sure you ever were, but I do know you're holding out on me. You're not telling me what really happened in the church on Tuesday."

"What makes you think I was in the church? I recall telling you I was catching a kip in the greenhouse."

"Let's just say you left something behind." In answer to Traveller's raised eyebrow, he added. "A smell. There was a powerful smell of sulphur in the church. Fumigation every night and the clothes stink. I know mine were terrible."

Traveller laughed. "Folks think we tramps smell like that because we ain't washed, but that ain't it. I've had a bath three days in a row and been fumigated three days in a row." He sniffed at his sleeve. "They reek. If hell smells this bad I'm going to live a very good life and make sure I don't end up there."

"Start with telling the truth then. That should give you some marks in God's balance book."

Traveller drew in some smoke and blew it out slowly. "All right. I was in the church that afternoon. It was a cold day and I've sometimes slipped in there for a little kip before finding my bed for the night. It was empty at that hour and I goes upstairs to the balcony and stretch out on one of the pews. I've dropped off nice when the next thing is I'm wide awake because I can hear coves shouting downstairs. They must have been loud because they was in the back where the offices are." He puffed on the pipe again and Murdoch shifted impatiently. "Just rein in a bit, Willie, I'll say it in my own good time. It's not often I have such rapt attention from a frog. I know what you were going to ask me, but no, I

couldn't make out what they were saying. All I can tell you is that one in particular is real mad about something. He's shouting more than the other. It don't go on too long, hardly enough to say how do you do, how are you, and how's your mother's health. Then they shuts up and a few ticks later, I hear a door slam shut so I gathers one of them had left by the back way. All nice and quiet now and I tucks myself back into my wooden bed. I ain't interested in other folks' barneys. I drops off properly this time, but wouldn't you know I'm woke again cos I hear somebody come pitter-patting down the aisle. I takes a peek and I sees this lady. She kneels down in front of that rail they've got in the front of the church. Oh no, Jack, don't tell me we're in for a prayer meeting, I says to myself. I know how it'll be if I get found." He sniffed. "I'm leery of the type of Christian ladies who fancy themselves good Samaritans but who want you to keep your place and that ain't asleep in the balcony of the church. Anyways, she doesn't stay long on her knees but trots off through the door at the back of the church. I'm a sitting there wondering if this ain't a good time to leave when the next thing I know, the woman is shrieking her head off. She don't come back into the church, but I can hear her outside, crying like she's seen the devil himself. I thinks it might be wise to do some investigating myself so I slips down the staircase that leads to the back of the church where the offices are. Well, I can smell the blood right away and I know something bad has happened and I'd better not linger. The door to one of the offices is open and I can see a man lying on his back. He has a knife sticking out of the side of his neck and his face is all smashed in on one side." Traveller paused to take a particularly long pull on the pipe. He blew out slowly. "Needless to say, the poor cove is no longer one of the living -"

"How long do you think he had been dead?"

"Well I didn't touch him, but I got the sense it wasn't long. The wounds were still oozing." The tramp glanced over at

Murdoch. "Would you say I am being of assistance to the police in this case and that will balance out any little sins I might have committed?"

"Yes, yes. Get on with it, for God's sake."

"Well, you know now how important a good pair of boots is to a tramp. I see the poor dead fellow is wearing a pair that are a sight better than mine. He obviously don't need them any more, so I get them off fast as I can and then let myself out by the side door. There weren't anybody around, thank goodness, so I go straight over to the Gardens so I could change the boots."

"Did you also take the man's watch?"

Traveller shook his head. "I didn't see no watch. I told you the gospel truth when I said I found that one in the entrance to the greenhouse." Again he took a pull of the pipe. "I'm thinking it might have been laid there as a trap. The chain weren't broke for one thing. I should have known better but there you go, we're all human, aren't we? It was a handsome piece and I couldn't resist it."

Traveller had a good point about the watch, Murdoch thought.

"Did you see a biscuit tin in the church?"

"A tin? Oh, you're right. I forgot. It was laying right beside the body. I seen it under the lady's arm when she was a praying. She must have dropped it when she came on him dead like that. I did pick it up. No sense in wasting good food. I ate the cake and left the tin under a bush in the greenhouse if she's looking for it."

"Was it a man who was arguing with the pastor?"

"Of course it was. There wouldn't be shouting like that if one of them was a lady, would there?"

"Would you recognize the voice if you were to hear it again?"

"Nope. Like I said, I couldn't even make out words, just that they was having a big barney. That much was clear."

Murdoch tapped his fingers on the bed. "You tell a good story, Traveller, but then you've had lots of practice. How do I know it's true? It could just have easily been you who went into the pastor's office, asking for money. He was distracted by something and wouldn't talk to you. You became enraged and struck him with the letter opener, then kicked him in the side of the head. This version fits the facts just as well."

Traveller laughed out loud, genuinely amused. "Look, Willie, if I had lost my temper and done in every man who ever turned me down, I'd have been hung more times than fifty cats have lives." He gazed at Murdoch through the haze of smoke between them. "Speaking of overhearing, I heard you and your inspector having a barney earlier. He's hell bent on sending me to the gallows. I'm charged and convicted with him. I thought about it and decided I'd better tell you the truth so as to give you a chance to find the real culprit."

It was Murdoch's turn to laugh. "And here I thought you had repented of your sins and wanted to help me."

Traveller waved his pipe. "That too."

Chapter Forty-Five

OLIVIA AND ED WERE WAITING for him in the front hall.

"You'd better hurry up, we don't have much time," said Olivia. "There's sure to be a long queue already."

"I'm ready. I just have to change coat and hat with Ed."

"What's he going to do now?"

"He can stay in my office."

"That's a laugh. Ed in a frog's job. Let's hope he won't have any plungers to deal with."

"Don't worry, all he's going to do is sit there and shut up."

Clearly Olivia was a mite jealous of Ed's change in status, even if it was pretend. As for him, he was beaming and when Murdoch slipped on the dirty-looking hat and the long, heavily stained coat, he could see why. Even with the sealskin coat, Ed was definitely getting the better end of the exchange.

Leaving him safely ensconced behind the desk with a copy of the chief constable's annual report to keep him occupied, Murdoch and Olivia set out for the depot. She had softened toward him again and chatted away as they walked up Parliament as fast as he could manage.

"Ed and I are thinking of getting hitched this summer."

"I thought you didn't believe in marriage?"

"Who told you that? It'll be good for business and Tim needs a father as he's getting older."

She seemed oblivious to the fact that her business as she called it was on the other side of the law. Murdoch had promised them a pardon if they helped him and he hoped he'd be able to honour that promise.

"We'll invite you," she added.

The depot was at the corner of Parliament and Oak Streets on the front steps of the Methodist church. The queue of applicants was already about twenty strong and Olivia and Murdoch slipped in at the end. A trestle table was set up in front of the church doors and two well-dressed ladies were standing behind it with aprons over their fur coats and soup ladles at the ready in their hands.

"Where's your pail?" Olivia hissed in Murdoch's ear.

"I didn't think to bring one."

She smirked at him triumphantly. "No good at this, are you? Good thing I have mine."

He glanced around and saw that all the other people in the queue were carrying enamel or tin pails of various sizes and shapes. The majority of the applicants were women. Behind him an old lady, wizened and toothless, muttered to herself and avoided his glance. She was carrying a blackened iron pot. In front of him was a coloured girl, about ten years old, who had a scarf tied over her summer bonnet for headgear. There were only two other men in the entire group, one middle-aged and bone thin, who shifted restlessly from side to side as he waited, the other younger and fierce-looking. He stood slightly apart from the others, ashamed of being in such company.

"Do you see the girl?" Murdoch asked Olivia.

She shook her head. "Not yet."

The church doors opened and two men came out carrying a large, steaming soup pot between them, which they hoisted onto the trestle table. The queue stirred and shuffled forward. The women who were serving were friendly and brisk.

"Give your docket to Mrs. Heller as you come up," called out one of them. "Hurry up now, get it while it's hot. Hold up your pail, there's a good girl."

This was addressed to the ten-year-old. She received her dollop of soup, covered it with a tin lid, picked up two slices of bread from the bin, and hurried away. Her pail wasn't that

large and Murdoch wondered how many people it was supposed to feed.

From where he stood, the soup smelled good and the eagerness with which the applicants in the queue stared at the pot confirmed they felt the same.

Suddenly, Olivia nudged him with her elbow. "There she is, over there."

A young woman with a plaid shawl over her head was walking slowly up the road. She had a pail in her hands, which were ungloved.

"What do you want me to do?" Olivia whispered.

"Nothing at the moment. Just get your soup. And let her get hers, then we'll talk to her."

He could see the woman scanning the group and he ducked his head. He didn't want anything to frighten her away and he could feel his heart beating faster in anticipation. She might hold the key to the murder.

She joined the end of the line just as Olivia and Murdoch were moved forward. He was so obviously in pain the two women serving at the trestle table smiled on him with sympathy.

"He forgot his pail," said Olivia as she held out hers for her serving. The older of the two women, a sweet-faced matronly woman, reached down and brought out an enamel bowl from a box beside her.

"You can use this, but you'll have to eat your soup here."

Mrs. Heller intervened, "Do you have your docket?"

Murdoch groaned to himself. He'd forgotten all about that. "No, I don't."

She frowned at him, her good humour vanishing, a woman who was wise to the ways of paupers. "You did receive one, I hope?"

"Well, I, er -"

"'Course he did," Olivia jumped in. "He's on Reverend Howard's list, if you want to check."

“We don’t go by lists,” said the woman. “You have to present us with a docket.” She reached into a cloth bag on the table and pulled out a white slip of paper. “It looks like this.” She’d raised her voice as if he had suddenly become hard of hearing.

Olivia turned to Murdoch and snapped, “You’d forget your head if it was loose.” She swivelled back to the church woman. “I’ll vouch for him, missus. He hurt his back chopping wood and I think it affected his brain.”

Some brave soul from the rear of the queue shouted out, “What’s the hold up?”

The older matron hesitated, then nodded at her companion. Ungraciously, Mrs. Heller seized the bowl and spooned half a ladle of soup into it. Olivia’s pail was filled next and they picked up their bread and moved away quickly from the line, making their way over to one of the benches by the curb. Most of the people in the queue left immediately after they’d received their helping but some, like them, sat on the bench to eat the soup while it was indeed hot. Murdoch had no utensil with which to eat the thick glutinous liquid so he followed the example of a man next to him and brought the bowl to his lips and half drank, half chewed it down. Although the colour was an unappetizing grey, and the consistency was that of wallpaper glue, it was surprisingly tasty and he had no trouble eating it. Olivia took out a spoon from her pocket and used that.

The bread was dry and Murdoch used it to sop up the last bit of soup. He wiped his mouth on his sleeve.

“Oi, that’s Ed’s good coat,” said Olivia. “I’m going to buy him a new one.”

The young woman in the shawl was now at the front of the line and she received her helping, got her two slices, and started to walk away.

“Go and talk to her, quick,” said Murdoch. “Tell her who I am and that I must talk to her about what she said to you. I

won't prosecute." He squeezed Olivia's arm. "Please give me a good reference, I'm depending on you."

"Take care of my pail." She got up and hurried over to the girl. They were out of earshot, but Murdoch could follow what was being said. First the surprised greeting, then the sudden alarmed glance in his direction (he smiled), then the vigorous shaking of the head, then more talking, Olivia's hands gesticulating (another smile from him), finally a reluctant agreement. Olivia took the girl's arm and led her to the bench. She was even younger than she had seemed from a distance, but poverty had worn away most of the prettiness she might have had. She had the pasty skin typical of somebody who doesn't eat decent food. Her dark brown eyes were hard and wary.

"Mr. Murdoch, this is Ida. She's agreed to help but only if you promise she won't get into trouble."

Murdoch stood up and touched his hat. "Hello, Ida. It's not you I'm after. I want to follow up on something you told Mrs. Bagley."

"I told who?"

"Me," said Olivia.

"Are you the frog's shill?"

"No, I'm not. He's making me do it."

Murdoch was irritated by this remark and his voice was sharp. "Let's say we struck a bargain. Both sides benefit."

Olivia sucked in her cheeks. "We've all got to make a living in this sorry world, haven't we?"

"Yes, we do, and that includes me," Murdoch snapped back at her.

Ida had watched this exchange with interest and for some reason it seemed to bring her more over to Murdoch's side.

"I'm getting perishing here while you two barney. Can we get on with it so I can go home?"

Murdoch forced himself to calm down. "You mentioned a certain man to Mrs. Bagley here. You said he was a Visitor with the city. Do you know his name?"

"Can't say as I do."

Murdoch reached into his inner pocket and took out his money clip. He had five one-dollar bills. He pulled out two of them.

"Will this further our conversation?"

"Two won't, but three might. I'm not that chatty."

"All right, three dollars and no more."

Ida took the money from him and stuffed it inside her jacket. Then she laughed, a loud, coarse laugh that was nevertheless genuine.

"You should have heard first and paid after because truth is I really don't know the cove's name. They don't introduce themselves. They'll ask for yours, mind. They ask all sorts of questions of *you*. They poke around your room to make sure you really are starving and freezing and not just malingering. Mostly they want to see if you are hickey and even if you've downed some vile brew to help you forget your godforsaken life, they don't give a pauper's dilberry. You're shit out of luck if you're caught. Then like God Almighty himself, they decide if you are going to get a docket for a few bits of coal that won't last more than three days and food that isn't enough to feed a dog anyway and for this you have to bob and bow and look ever so grateful or you're off their list."

This flood of bitterness washed over Murdoch. "Are they all like that, all the Visitors?"

"Yeah, they all are. Some just have more cream on the top than others, but underneath they're the same sour milk."

She plopped herself down on the bench and removed the lid from the pail. "I'm going to have my pig's swill now. Talk away."

"The man who propositioned, er -"

"I know what that means. The man who wanted to have some touch up in exchange for a couple of dockets."

"What did he look like?"

Ida raised her pail to her lips and, like Murdoch had, half ate, half drank the soup. "Can't tell you that either, he was muffled up. Didn't want his mug to show."

"Was he tall, short? Fat? Thin?"

She sighed. "Let's put it this way, mister. I wasn't paying much attention. They're all the same to me because from where I'm working I usually can't see their faces anyway."

Olivia snorted in disapproval.

"There's bin so many, I can't tell one from the other," continued Ida. "I make it a point, really. Why should I remember them? They don't want to know me,"

Murdoch couldn't help himself. "But you're hardly twenty, surely?"

She snickered. "You're out by two years, mister."

"I'd have said close to thirty myself," chipped in Olivia.

"Nobody asked you, did they?"

Both women looked as if they would like to continue in this vein, but Murdoch quickly brought Ida back to the matter at hand. "Had this man been to see you before?"

"No. I do know that much. This one was new. But he was a gawdelpus, I can tell you that."

"How do you know?"

"He had to say his prayers first. 'God forgive me for what I am about to do and forgive this daughter of Eve.' Horse plop like that. I ain't looking for forgiveness. Then he prayed even worse afterward about what a wicked man he was. He got himself all worked up, made me nervous. But it's all bollocks as far as I'm concerned. If it bothers your conscience so bad, don't do it. Or go somewhere private and flog the bishop." She wiped the bread around the rim of the pail to mop up the last vestiges of the soup. "Do you know what kind of soup this is?"

Murdoch shook his head.

"Nor me. S's good though."

Murdoch hadn't finished half of his second slice and he offered it to the woman. She nodded thanks and stuffed it

into her mouth, licking her dirty fingers. Olivia made it clear what she thought of such disgusting manners.

Then Ida snapped her fingers. "You know what, that old Tom did give me a name. Some of them like you to say their name, then they can pretend they aren't really paying for it. I get it all the time. 'Oh Ida, tell Johnny he's got a lovely big cock.'"

Olivia looked shocked and glanced at Murdoch in dismay. Ida grinned more. "This one wanted me to scold him. That was fine with me. 'Oh, you are a very bad man. You shouldn't be doing this, Mr. Howard.'"

Murdoch flinched. "That was his name? Howard?"

She shrugged. "That's what he said. Christian name, Charles. I made a joke of it, 'Oh Prince Charlie how 'ard you are.' But he didn't like that at all. I thought he might even haul off with a stotter." She stared at Murdoch. "Why've you got that face on? Don't tell me he's your best friend?"

Chapter Forty-Six

MURDOCH TRIED TO COMPREHEND what the girl had just said.

Ida poked him. "Oi. You know for a copper you give too much away on your ugly mug."

Olivia was also gaping. "She ain't talking about the pastor that was done in, is she?"

"What pastor that was done in?" Ida asked, her hard eyes flashing with excitement.

Murdoch didn't answer. "Ida, when did this Visitor last come to see you?"

"Monday afternoon. That's their regular hours. But come on, what's the gabble on a dead pastor?"

"I'm investigating the murder of a Reverend Charles Howard. He was killed on Tuesday afternoon."

Ida upended the pail to make sure it was truly empty. "Too bad for him."

"And too bad for you too. No more bargains to be made," said Olivia.

"Oh I don't know about that. I'm planning to meet the cove this very afternoon, as a matter of fact."

"Dead men don't meet up with anybody, the last I heard."

Ida laughed, her hearty coarse laugh. "Most of the men I deal with *are* dead. That's why they come to me. It's my job to bring 'em back to life."

Murdoch jumped in. "What do you mean, you're planning to meet this man today?"

"Just what I said. He came by on Wednesday and said to meet him in the Gardens after I'd done at the depot."

Olivia turned to Murdoch. "So it isn't the pastor. She's talking about somebody else?"

"It would appear that way. Either he gave out Howard's name or it's an amazing coincidence."

"Too bloody amazing to be believed, if you ask me."

Ida frowned. "What are you two gabbling on about? Are you saying the dead gawdelpus was named Charlie Howard?"

"That's right," Murdoch answered.

She snickered. "Cheeky tom then. Must have read about it in the papers. It happens. The best one I ever heard was a cove telling me he was the prime minister ... come to think of it, maybe he was."

"Watch your tongue, Ida Harper," said Olivia suppressing a laugh.

Ida seemed to be enjoying her role as teacher of the game. "They'll say anything to keep you off the track just in case you fancy putting a bit of a squeeze on the wife. One fellow said he was dying and he was a virgin and his doctor had recommended female connections before he passed on. Said it might prolong his life." She laughed. "Must have, because he's still in the land of the living six years later. Big nob with city council. This Howard cove tried to excuse his little sin by telling me he hadn't had conjugal relations for weeks because his wife had one under her apron."

"Didn't you tell me the pastor's wife was expecting?" Olivia exclaimed to Murdoch.

"Yes, she is. And he wouldn't have learned that from the newspaper."

Ida tapped Murdoch's arm. "Is that all because I have to get going?"

"You swear it's one and the same man who came to see you on Monday? You said you couldn't tell one Tom from another."

"Not to look at, but I know voices. He sounded like he had a cold, but that was probably a lot of gammon too. Of course it was the same one. And he wants the same thing. He must have been happy with our exchange of favours."

She wiped her mouth with a filthy handkerchief she took from her pocket. "I'm off. He won't wait."

Murdoch grabbed her by the arm. "You're not going anywhere. I need to talk to this fellow." He took out his money clip and removed the last two dollars. "Here. Take this and I want you to swap shawls with Mrs. Bagley."

"This is my good wool," protested Olivia.

"So's mine," said Ida. But the truth was her shabby plaid was far inferior to Olivia's hand-knitted shawl, as they both knew.

"Please, ladies. We don't have much time."

Reluctantly, Olivia removed her shawl and handed it to the other woman.

"Ida, what is your last name and where do you live? No, you won't get into trouble, but I'll have to come back to talk to you."

"I'd like that," said the girl with a lecherous smile that elicited another snort of disapproval from Olivia. "It's Harper. Ida Harper and I live at 310 Sherbourne, the first room at the back." She wrapped the shawl over her head. "Do I get to keep this?"

"No."

"Yes."

Olivia and Murdoch spoke simultaneously, and he had the feeling he had just said goodbye to half a week's wages.

"Where exactly were you to meet this man?"

"In the Horticultural Gardens. There's a greenhouse on the south side, the one with the water wheel and the pond. It's nice and private with all the shrubs."

"He's taking a risk, ain't he?" said Olivia. "People go through there."

"Not so much at this time of the year. He said it was convenient for him."

"In what way, convenient?"

“He lives close by. He can boil the kettle, pop out for a bit of dock, and be back in time to mash the tea. But if you want my opinion, he’s the kind that gets excited if there’s summat of a risk involved.”

Murdoch got to his feet. “Ida, thank you for your help.” He took Olivia by the arm. “Come on. We have to hurry.”

She allowed herself to be led away. “I still don’t know why I had to give that tart my good shawl.”

“Because I want you to pretend to be her.”

She stopped in her tracks. “Pretend to be a tart? Never. Besides, it sounds dangerous. You seem to suspect this cove of doing for Mr. Howard.”

“I don’t know that for sure. I just want to talk to him. You’ll be quite safe, I promise you.”

“You and your promises. You couldn’t defend a fox from a rabbit in your condition.”

She was right about that, and the last thing Murdoch wanted was to see her hurt. “All I want you to do is be there so he at least comes into the greenhouse and I can identify him.”

She studied his face. “Did your ma want you to be a copper?”

“I don’t know what you mean.”

“If she did, she’d be beaming on you right now the way I’ve seen the mothers of some of the bloody priests. They go to every mass and think they’re Mary Herself.”

Murdoch didn’t know if he completely understood the comparison and Olivia’s comment opened up all sorts of possibilities for future reflection but not right now.

“Lumbago or no lumbago, Olivia. I won’t put you in danger.”

She gave his cheek a quick pat. “Don’t worry. I’m good at taking care of myself.”

It didn’t take them long to reach the Horticultural Gardens. The grounds and the outside of the pavilion looked as deserted as ever.

"We'd better not be seen together," said Murdoch. "I'll go in first."

"What if he's already there?"

"So much the better. Then I won't have to involve you."

Olivia frowned. "Hold on. You're not thinking straight. You could go and arrest some innocent geezer who's just in there sniffing the flowers. You need to catch this cove in the act. Don't say no. You wouldn't be able to prove a thing unless he actually says or does something."

"Olivia, I can't -"

She interrupted him. "I told you, I can take care of myself. Besides it's worth my while to get in good with the frogs, especially you with your conscience."

Murdoch was about to protest again, but she stopped him. "Get a move on, for Christ's sake. I'll wait here. If he is inside, you'll have to walk on by, but at least you'll get a gander at him."

She was right.

"Give me five minutes. If I'm not out by then it means he isn't there and I'll have found a hiding place. The greenhouse where they're supposed to meet is to the left through the connecting door. Near the end of the path, right next to the water wheel, you'll see a tool shed. I'm going to try to hide in there."

She nodded and pulled the shawl closer around her face. "Poo, this thing stinks."

Murdoch left her there, pushed open the door into the greenhouse, and headed for the connecting door to the left. When he went through, he was disappointed to see the place was quite deserted, no muffled man on the prowl. He'd been jolted when Ida said this rendezvous was convenient for her Visitor. There were two men who fitted into that category, Swanzey and Drummond, and both would know the more intimate facts of Howard's family life. He grimaced. So much for intuition. Until now, he wouldn't have suspected either one capable of misusing his position

as Visitor the way this one was. And certainly not of killing Howard. But one of them had.

Chapter Forty-Seven

MURDOCH WALKED DOWN the ramp and along the path to the bend where the pond and water wheel were. His back was worse. He felt sympathy for women condemned to wear tight corsets. His entire lower back felt as if it was being held fast by whalebone. Running was impossible however much he willed himself to override the pain.

Ida's Visitor had chosen well. This section of the greenhouse was completely secluded, the windows obscured by the lush shrubs and the entrance quite hidden by the bend in the path. A bench was at the corner. He smelled again the soft perfume of the hyacinths.

The entrance to the little hut was through a gate with a notice, WORKMEN ONLY , and a short path led to the door. Murdoch thanked God it wasn't locked and stepped inside. The one small window must have been broken because it was partially boarded over and the interior was dark. Murdoch opened his eyes wide, willing himself to see through the gloom. After his eyes adjusted, he could see now that he was in a tool shed, with gardening implements, spades and forks, stacked around the walls. The hut was in disrepair and there were gaps in the wood slats. He could hear the splashing as each paddle of the waterwheel hit the stream rushing from the wall. By pressing his face to a space between the window boards, he could see the path but only a few feet to his left. It was too late to find another place now, but he might have attempted it if Olivia hadn't suddenly appeared. She walked by, paused, and turned to face the way she had come. Murdoch tensed. Just as suddenly a man appeared a few feet behind her. He was

fairly tall, bundled up in a long black coat. A muffler was wrapped around his neck and face and his black fedora was pulled down low.

Who was it?

Murdoch saw rather than heard Olivia greet the man. The noise of the wheel drowned out her words, but some sort of exchange went on. She was keeping the shawl wrapped around her face all this time, but she shook her head. Murdoch could see the man recoil and suddenly, he reached and yanked the shawl away from her. Olivia backed away. Murdoch knew she was talking fast to assuage him, but he looked around. He shouted and this time Murdoch could hear him.

“Who the hell are you? Where’s the other whore?”

Olivia continued to back down the path, but the man followed. Suddenly, he grabbed her by the arms and started to shake her violently. To Murdoch’s horror, Olivia went completely limp and collapsed in the man’s grip. He struggled to pull her to her feet, but he couldn’t. Murdoch had to move and he shoved open the door, yelling, “Let go of her, I’m the police.”

The man turned, saw Murdoch, and dropped Olivia to the ground. The only way out was down the path and he went to make a run for it. Olivia, however, was blocking his way and as he jumped over her apparently lifeless body, she reached up and grabbed him by the ankle. With perfect timing, she sat upright and shoved him away from her as if she were tossing a caber. He lost his balance and fell sideways against the low wall of the pond, toppling over into the water. Arms flailing, he tried desperately to stand up but the pond bed was too slippery and he couldn’t find his footing. Olivia had scrambled to her feet and Murdoch hobbled by her, stepped over the wall himself, and tried to reach her assailant. However, he too slipped off a rock and fell to his knees. The other man tried to get to his feet, but he slipped again and fell backwards. This time he landed directly in the

path of the waterwheel, which was continuing its relentless turning. The edge of one of the paddles caught him on the top of the head, stunning him. Then the next paddle struck him.

And then the next.

Desperately, Murdoch reached for him and managed to grab his trouser leg, but he couldn't move him. He called out to Olivia and she leaned over the wall and seized the man's other leg. Together they managed to drag him away from the wheel. He was inert and the water was scarlet. He had lost his hat, the scarf was still tightly wrapped around his face, but above the scarf was only a ghastly mess of blood and bone.

Murdoch managed to get the body partly out of the water onto the wall, and panting from the effort, and the pain in his back, he climbed onto the path and bent double until he could get his breath. Olivia had stepped away.

"Are you all right?" he gasped at her. She was white.

"He would have killed me if he could. I saw it in his eyes. He must have known the game was up and he panicked."

"Are you hurt?"

"Naw. That's an old trick I used. He grabbed me and I let my entire weight collapse. Took him by surprise."

Murdoch straightened up. "Olivia. We'll have to get some help. Do you think you can run to the station?"

She nodded. "Don't know about run, me legs have turned to jelly, but I'll do my best. He's quite done for, ain't he?"

"Yes. Tell the sergeant what has happened and say we need an ambulance."

For a moment she didn't move but stared into the red pond. "Who is he?"

Murdoch reached over and pulled the sodden scarf away from the man's face. What was left of his jaw was thin and clean-shaven, the open mouth loose now.

"His name's Matthew Swanzey."

Epilogue

"HE WAS A GOOD MAN , as quiet as a mouse. Never a moment's trouble. He never complained about his meals like some of them do. I just can't believe what you're telling me."

Swanzey's landlady had been repeating variations on these words for the past ten minutes. Murdoch and Crabtree had gone to the dead man's lodgings and had yet to get past Mrs. Kew's disbelief and distress at what she'd heard from them.

"He was always so considerate. Why just last week I came down with a touch of phlebitis and he brought in my tea to me instead of me waiting on him. Then he sat and read aloud from the Psalms."

The memory brought on more tears, and Murdoch edged toward the door.

"Mrs. Kew, I'm going to need to see Reverend Swanzey's room. Constable Crabtree will stay here with you. I wonder if I couldn't trouble you for a cup of tea? We could all do with one, I'm sure."

Having something to do calmed the poor woman and Murdoch was able to go upstairs to the front room that had been Swanzey's. He stood in the threshold for a moment. He had rather expected the room to be neat and austere and it was. Mrs. Kew's taste ran to lace and red plush with a plethora of ceramic ornaments, but Swanzey's was as plain as a monk's. The room was quite spacious and the furnishings barely filled it. There was a narrow bed with a white coverlet beneath the window; a wardrobe; a bookcase, half empty; a washstand; and, in the centre of the room, a small round table with two wooden chairs. There

were no pictures on the walls, the floor was uncarpeted. Murdoch could see an envelope propped up against the large bible on the table and when he went over to investigate it, he was startled to see that the envelope was addressed to him.

Murdoch was stripped to the waist, lying on his stomach on the kitchen table with brown paper across his lower back. Amy Slade was beside him, testing the iron for heat.

“Are you sure this will work?” Murdoch asked her.

“It’s a proven remedy for lumbago. You’ll feel much better afterwards.”

She brought the iron down to his back and started to iron as if he were a shirt or a sheet. Murdoch found it was not a disagreeable sensation, quite pleasant, in fact, although lying on his stomach was uncomfortable.

“Go on. I am quite able to iron and listen at the same time.”

“Swanzey started out by saying that if I was reading the letter it meant he was either dead or in prison. In either case he wanted to explain what he called ‘the regrettable occurrence,’ which is about the most ludicrous expression I’ve ever heard to describe a brutal murder of an innocent man. Regrettable occurrence, indeed. As I suspected finally, the pastor had discovered Swanzey was misusing his position to get sexual favours from the female paupers on his list. When he was confronted, Swanzey said, and I quote, ‘The devil threw a cloak of darkness over me.’ Apparently, he couldn’t bear the notion that he might not continue to be God’s voice and servant, something he said he had yearned to be all of his life.”

Amy pressed on the iron. “I can almost feel sorry for the fellow. He sounds like a tormented soul.”

Murdoch tried to turn his head to look at her. “This tormented soul, as you call him, killed five people.”

"I'm sorry, Will. I don't condone in the least what he did, but it seems as if he was mentally imbalanced."

"You're more charitable than I am. I think he was a miserable worm of a man, obsessed with himself and what he saw as his spiritual struggles. He took no responsibility for murdering Charles Howard, blaming it all conveniently on the devil. The only reference to his preying on powerless women was what he called 'the vices of my blood,' which were again the result of the devil putting temptation in his way. He said the Tugwells were Lucifer's agents and that it was God who arranged things so that Swanzey was present when Louisa Howard received the blackmail letter. That gave him a chance to cover his arse, excuse the expression, and silence them."

"What was this letter? You haven't told me."

"I spoke to Mrs. Howard last evening and she acknowledged she'd received a letter from one of the Tugwells accusing her husband of improper conduct. I think that as soon as they knew the pastor was dead, one or the other of them cooked up a little blackmail scheme. As Olivia would tell me, it's an old trick. The dead man can't protest his innocence. She had wanted to show the letter to me, but Swanzey persuaded her to destroy it. He must have been afraid the Tugwells would betray him if pressed too hard, because of course, it was him, not Howard, who was the guilty party. So he immediately took steps to make sure they didn't. He visited trusting, lonely old Thomas Hicks, put prussic acid in his tea, and as soon as he was unconscious, he blocked the chimney. He probably brought him the cheap coke as a gift. Fortunately for us, he made a mistake and left with the bottle of prussic acid; otherwise it would have been written off as the kind of tragic accident that is always happening to poor people. I wonder if that was God manipulating him or the devil? Carbon monoxide gas is indiscriminate, but Swanzey didn't care if he killed a household of people as long as he silenced Esther and Josie."

Ida Harper, another woman he coerced, said she never saw his face, but Josie must have.”

Murdoch felt his face going red at the anticipation that Amy would ask him how Ida could have had connections without seeing Swanzey’s face, but she didn’t.

“Poor Mrs. Howard, to get a letter like that.”

“She was relieved when I explained it to her. She said that she’d always found Matthew Swanzey to be rather repulsive, but I don’t know if that’s an opinion rewritten after the fact. As far as I can tell, he was a respected member of the church. Speaking of the church, according to Mr. Swanzey, the devil also seemed to have blinded the members of the congregation and the church Synod who chose Howard as their pastor and not him. Swanzey was convinced that he was truly God’s beloved servant and these things were sent to test his faith. The Almighty just wasn’t revealing his hand yet, but it was a matter of time before Matthew would be taken up and exulted as the supremely eloquent witness to the Good News gospel. Another quote from the letter, ‘The voice of the Lord is in my ear and I will heed his commands to the extent of my ability.’ What a colossal conceit. Strip away all that religious folderol and you’ve got a man seething with jealousy. Howard won the coveted appointment, he was handsome and charming. Women loved him. Swanzey could only get acquiescence from starving women. No wonder, he even took the dead man’s identity when he found himself succumbing, once again, to the vices of his blood, as he called it.”

Amy tapped him lightly on the back of the head. “Lie still. You’re tightening your muscles and you’ll make things worse.”

But Murdoch couldn’t stop. “I presume it was at God’s bidding that he murdered those four innocent people, including a crippled child. But he was completely silent on that little matter.”

He closed his eyes. "I should have been on to the man earlier. There was an overcoat hanging in Swanzey's office. He must have come in, then been called to Howard's office where the pastor was in the midst of writing a letter that would destroy Swanzey's career. If I'd followed up on that bloody coat, I might have got him before he killed Hicks and the Tugwells."

Amy paused. "You don't know that, Will. He was cunning. He might have come up with a perfectly good explanation for the coat. What killed those people, alas, was that one of the Tugwells saw an opportunity to get some money. And the ultimate responsibility for their plight lies with society and our tolerating such poverty." Amy came around to the head of the table and peered at him. "I know you don't agree with me, but I'm not going to argue the matter right now. I need to get the other iron, this one is getting cold. Are you all right so far?"

"Quite, thank you. I've never felt like a shirt before, but now I know what that must be like."

She laughed. "We'll probably have to do this a few more times, so you'd better get used to it."

She turned over the brown paper and applied the fresh iron to it. They were quiet for a few moments while she worked.

"He did say something at the end of the letter that has stayed with me. 'If I am in the bosom of our Lord when you read this, I shall know what His judgment is and that is the only judgment that matters to me.' Let's hope he got a nasty shock. On the other hand, God has infinite mercy so who knows? But that's a topic for another day."

Amy returned the iron to its stand on the stove. "I think that's it for now."

"Can I sit up?"

"Yes, slowly though."

He eased himself into a sitting position on the table. His lumbago did feel much easier.

Amy smiled at him. The warmth of the iron had brought a flush to her face and her eyes were shining. She hadn't pinned up her hair and it was loose around her face. Murdoch was suddenly acutely aware that he was sitting in front of her in nothing but his undervest and trousers.

"Is there anything else I can do for you, sir?" Her voice was teasing.

"You could marry me." His words popped out before he could stop them.

She started to laugh but stopped when she saw his expression.

"Will ... I ..."

"I mean it. Miss Slade, I, William Murdoch, would like you to be my wife. If I could kneel down I would, but I'm afraid I might not get up again." He caught her hand and held it between his. "Please, dear Amy, do say yes."

She pulled her hand away. "Oh, dear, I, er, no, I couldn't."

"I'm sorry, I -"

"No, please don't look like that. It's not you at all. But marriage ... Will, surely you know how I feel about marriage?"

"No."

"I suppose you could say, I'm against it."

"I see."

"No, you obviously don't. Marriage isn't entered into on an equal basis. Women give up their identity, men don't. How would you feel if by marrying a woman you had to surrender your name, give up your job that you love, and be expected to wait on her hand and foot? And in addition you had to swear to obey her? What outdated nonsense that is."

Amy was looking even more flushed at this point.

Murdoch reached for his shirt, "Thank you for the lecture. I'm sorry if I touched on a sore point, that was not my intention."

"Will, I've hurt your feelings and I didn't mean to. I'm so honoured that you asked me."

“Even if it is an invitation to humiliation and servitude?”

“No, you don’t understand. Marriage as an institution I can’t abide, but marriage meaning a physical and spiritual connection between a man and a woman, I don’t disapprove of.” She ducked her head, suddenly shy. “Dear, honourable Will, so many times I’ve walked away from you rather than risk making a complete fool of myself because I so wanted to –” She stopped.

Murdoch stared at her, not initially comprehending, but Amy touched his arm.

“If you would consider me as your wife in that sense, I joyfully accept.”

“Are you saying what I think you’re saying?”

“Let’s put it this way. I won’t iron your shirts, but I will iron your back willingly and with love as long as you want me to.”

Her use of the word *love* almost made him want to weep. He tried to stand, but he couldn’t straighten up and he was forced to look at her with his head bent.

“Can you crouch down a little and seal that with a kiss?”

She obliged.

Author's Note and Acknowledgements

For the convenience of my plot, I have moved Chalmers Church from its real location, which is long gone. There was a Presbyterian church at the corner of Carlton and Jarvis, which is now a Lutheran church.

The House of Industry, also known as the city poor house, was at the location I have given it on Elm Street. Only the facade remains today, but it is easy to stand before it and feel the impact it might have had on the destitute and desperate people of the time who had to line up for their daily soup.

And speaking of soup, the unidentified soup that Murdoch swallows at the food depot was typical of the period. I came across a recipe while visiting the Judge's Lodging Museum in Presteigne, Wales. I made it, and it is exactly as described.

The poor house procedures I have used in the story were as depicted.

The current Dundas Street East was then named Wilton Street.

I have tried to be as accurate as I can be with all the historical details and regret any errors, however small.

As always, I am grateful to many people for their help in the making of this book.

Elaine, the librarian at the Pelham Library, was not only a gracious host but took time to inform me about the structures of the Presbyterian Church.

Jim, woodsman extraordinaire and regular member of the dog-field gang, set me straight about the subtleties of wood-

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Linda Wicks, the archivist at the Sisters of St. Joseph library, brought me fascinating registers and patiently waited for me to finish reading through them.

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My agent, Jane Chelius, is the best.

A JOURNEYMAN TO GRIEF

Maureen Jennings



MCCLELLAND & STEWART

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Acknowledgements

For Iden

And this time for Christina and Scott
and all the good folks at Shaftesbury Films

Henry Bolingbroke:

Nay, rather, every tedious stride I make
Will but remember me what a deal of
world I wander from the jewels that I
love.

Must I not serve a long apprenticeship
To foreign passages, and in the end,
Having my freedom, boast of nothing
else But that I was a journeyman to
grief?

-Richard II , Scene III

CHAPTER ONE

JULY 1858

She glanced over her shoulder to see if he was coming. What could he be doing? He'd been gone more than half an hour, and all he'd had to do was pick up the forgotten tobacco pouch from their hotel room and come right back. They had planned to take the steamer boat across the Falls, but they'd miss it if he didn't hurry. She shaded her eyes against the sun, but the road was deserted except for a carriage that was approaching slowly, the horse's head drooping wearily. She consulted the gold fob watch that had been her father's wedding present to her. It was a beautiful and extravagant gift, but the giving of it was marred by her father being in his cups and barely able to utter his congratulation, so that when she did consult the watch, her pride in its richness was tainted by her disappointment in him.

She shifted back on the bench. To her left, she could see a rainbow arching over the high-flung spray of the cascading water. She had been excited to come here for her honeymoon, but the week so far had been less than happy. Initially, she had been self-conscious, sure that the other guests were staring at them in disapproval. When she confessed this to her husband, he was dismissive rather

than kind, but she clung to his words: "You are the most beautiful woman in the room. The men covet you and the women are envious. Nobody knows. They think you are a Spanish countess."

She longed for him to say more, but in the short time they had been married, she had learned not to press forward with any discussion he didn't want to have. When he was courting her, he had been tender and solicitous, but nothing, not even her Aunt Hattie's blunt warnings about "man's nature," had prepared her for the roughness of their conjugal relations. She couldn't hide her discomfort, and he was impatient with her. "I wouldn't have expected such coldness from you of all people." She had cried so hard the first night that he had finally relented and teased and tickled her into a precarious laughter. This morning, she'd woken to find him sitting on the edge of the bed, looking at her. He had kissed her fiercely. "Today, I want you to wear your best blue silk gown, your largest crinoline, and your big hat with the peacock feathers. You will be the belle of the promenade."

So she had, and laced herself with unnecessary tightness that she now regretted on this hot day. Another quick check of the watch. What could be keeping him?

She heard the soft jingle of a horse's bridle and looked over her shoulder again. The carriage had halted and a man was coming across the grass toward her. He was heavy-set with a full untrimmed beard and moustache. His clothes and skin looked grubby. She fancied she could smell his stale sweat, but that impression might have been born only later, when he was on top of her. Somehow, from the first, her flesh knew who he was even though her mind would not accept it. Ever afterwards, she scourged herself for not immediately running toward the protection of the few visitors who were hanging over the railings watching the water. But then he was talking to her and she made the terrible mistake of listening.

“Ma’am, I must ask you to accompany me. I have bad news. Your husband has been taken ill. He’s in your hotel.”

She gasped. “What has happened to him?”

The man shrugged. “I can’t say. All I know is I was sent to find you and bring you to him at once. The doctor’s been summoned. You’re staying at the Grand, ain’t you?”

She nodded, not taking her eyes from his face, from the mouth that was smiling at her so falsely. Suddenly he stepped forward, and in one swift movement he pulled her from the bench. In a ghastly parody of an embrace, he crushed her against his chest so that her hat was almost knocked off her head, her nose and mouth were smothered, and she couldn’t breathe. She felt herself being carried to the carriage and thrust inside.

There was another man within whom she couldn’t see because she was shoved to the floor face down and at the same time something was stuffed in her mouth. It was vile-tasting and leathery, like a glove. The man pinned her with his knee, and in a moment he’d tied her hands behind her back. The carriage lurched forward.

CHAPTER TWO

APRIL 1896

Professor Broske was late arriving, and his audience was becoming restive. In the past week, Murdoch had been suffering another bout of insomnia, and now he yawned, wishing he was at home, dozing in front of the fire, instead of here in a lecture theatre with Dr. Julia Ogden. Not that he'd had much choice in the matter, as she was not an easy woman to refuse. Her usual companion to such events was her father, Dr. Uzziel Ogden, but he was confined to bed with a fever, and yesterday she had telephoned Murdoch at the police station and asked if he would accompany her to the Toronto Medical School.

"If you don't, I shall be relegated to the seats at the rear of the room with the other women. Professor Broske is a highly respected authority in his field, and I couldn't bear to miss anything. Besides, his topic for tonight is the physiology of fear. As a police officer, you might find it useful."

So here Murdoch was, in a room jammed with privileged and well-connected young men, all of them, he assumed, the sons of rich fathers. He'd glimpsed only a handful of women, and they were indeed seated at the back.

The door to the stage opened, and the eminent man swept in, followed by two student assistants wearing holland aprons and wheeling small trolleys. Broske was bewhiskered, balding, and short, and he exuded confidence and assurance. He strode to the podium, held up his hand for silence, and addressed the audience. His voice, lightly accented, was as resonant as any actor's.

"Good evening, gentlemen, and I am glad also to welcome the members of the fairer sex who are gracing us with their presence." He took a monocle from his breast pocket. "The topic of tonight's lecture is fear. I shall be conducting a few experiments, but I will not ask for volunteers so none of you have anything to fear on that account." The audience laughed dutifully. "I 'ave no doubt there is no one in this room tonight who has not at some time in their life experienced the emotion of fear. We are all, I'm sure, familiar with its manifestations, such as heart palpitations, shortness of breath, pallor, trembling, flight, sometimes immobility. Even I experienced a tremor of the 'and as I prepared to meet you. Such an emotion is not termed 'stage fright' for nothing." He paused for his little joke to take effect. "I should add, 'owever, that although the experience of fear in all its many varieties is universal and connects us to the greater family of mankind, we should keep in mind that certain races are more naturally afraid than others and women are more fearful than their brothers."

Murdoch wondered how Dr. Ogden, who, in his opinion, possessed an unparalleled coolness of disposition, was reacting to her hero's statement. As far as he could tell without blatantly staring at her, she was unmoved.

His hands tucked beneath the tails of his frockcoat, the professor moved away from the podium and began to pace back and forth. He spoke now as if he were dictating a letter, his tone slightly abstracted. "In lesser degrees, these physical effects may be useful to us. If threatened, those

men, or even women, who are normally of a timid or placid disposition may be roused to defend themselves. 'Owever, we who carry this fragile machine of our body about with us continually ought to remember that any shock that exceeds the usual measure may prove fatal. I can adumbrate several instances of men, women, and children who have literally been frightened to death." He stopped to scan the rows in front of him, and such was the power of his personality, Murdoch wondered for a moment if he were trying to illustrate his point.

"Let us remember that fear is a disease to be cured. The brave man may fail sometimes, but the coward always fails."

A bespectacled young man sitting close to the front raised his hand. "Excuse me, sir. I have a question."

The professor frowned. "Can it wait? I usually take questions at the end of the lecture."

"My query seems apropos to the moment, sir, if you don't mind."

"Very well."

"If, as you say, fear is a disease and yet you have also reminded us that we have all experienced fear, are you then saying that all of us in this room are, to a greater or lesser degree, in a state of ill health? And if that is the case, what may we do to effect a cure for ourselves?"

The smallest titter rippled through the audience, as nobody was going to risk an outright guffaw until they saw how Professor Broske reacted.

He smiled and some of the tension left the air. "First, we must understand that the physiological responses we experience when we are afraid are reflex movements." He wagged his finger in the direction of the young student. "If I were to publicly berate you for your impertinence, which I have no intention of doing, dear fellow, your heart would start to race, the pupils of your eyes would no doubt dilate, and the inspirations of your breath would be curtailed.

Those reactions would be beyond your power to control. And let me hasten to add, no shame lies in that direction. Courage of character is another matter entirely. It can, and should be, taught. Let me say that courage springs from three sources: nature, education, and conviction.”

Murdoch glimpsed several students scribbling earnestly in their notebooks.

Broske continued. “There is a culture which heredity transmits to the brains of our children. The future and the power of a nation do not lie solely in its commerce, its science, or its army but are also formed in the hearts of its citizens, the wombs of its mothers, and the courage or cowardice of its sons.”

There was an outburst of applause in which Dr. Ogden joined heartily. Then Broske snapped his fingers at one of the assistants, who promptly wheeled his trolley forward. On it were a small electric battery and a glass jar that Murdoch could see contained frogs trying desperately to climb out. They were scrambling over one another in their haste but unable to get a grip on the smooth glass. The professor adjusted his monocle.

“Paradoxically, gentlemen, to understand the functions of the brain, you must first understand what it does and does not control. For instance, as I have said, our reflexes are controlled by our nervous systems and will continue to operate even if the brain is removed.”

He picked up a large pair of scissors while the assistant reached in, removed one of the frogs, and handed it to him. With one snip, Broske decapitated the creature and laid the body on the tray. He dropped the head into a bin.

He took a brown bottle from the tray. “Watch what happens when I drop a small amount of this vinegar onto the leg.” The frog’s rear leg jumped.

“Even though the brain is obviously no longer functioning, the nervous system is intact,” said Broske. “The

frog will continue to react for two or more hours, even though death has supposedly occurred. Another, please."

Murdoch felt a nudge in his side from Dr. Julia Ogden.

She whispered, "Surely this isn't bothering you, William? It is only a frog, after all. You've seen far worse."

She was right, but Murdoch had never seen live creatures dispatched with such callousness in front of an audience before. None of the medical students in his vicinity seemed to be troubled, and he wasn't about to turn around and gawk at the female students at the back of the room to see how they were faring.

"I'm all right, ma'am," he whispered, trying to focus on what the professor was saying.

In the next half-hour, Broske decapitated four more frogs, and their headless bodies lay on the white, blood-stained cloth while he used various techniques to demonstrate how the nerves could be made to activate the muscles of their legs. Murdoch glanced at the big clock on the wall. How much longer? Finally, to his relief, Broske swept the dead frogs into the bin and rinsed his hands in a basin of water held by one of the assistants.

"These are simple experiments that can be repeated with various creatures, including warm-blooded ones. Professor Goltz, of whom, no doubt, you have heard, brought a dog, part of which had the brain removed, to the International Congress of Medicine in Milan. It was quite remarkable to see the animal react to stimuli. However, for our purposes, we must illustrate our point with human subjects." He nodded to one of his assistants. "Fetch the boys, if you please."

"I hope he doesn't intend to cut off their heads," Murdoch said to Dr. Ogden, who frowned at him.

The other assistant set up two chairs facing the audience, then wheeled forward the second cart on which sat an electric battery with wires attached and four cylinders covered with blank paper. The first helper, who

had the thin, mangy look of a hungry fox, returned, bringing with him two boys about ten or eleven years old. They wore identical grey serge suits and cloth caps, but one was dark-skinned, the other fair and blond. They both looked apprehensive.

Broske smiled warmly and indicated the chairs. "Please take a seat, boys. I'd like you to put your caps and your jackets on the floor beside you." He addressed his audience. "These young gentlemen are residents of your St. Nicholas orphanage. I've promised them, what you call, a bang-up feast after our little demonstration, so they were quite eager to come for a night out, weren't you, lads?"

They both grinned obediently, but Murdoch suspected that they were no longer so eager. The two assistants were busy getting the boys ready for Broske's demonstration. First, they tied a band around each boy's chest. A stiff wire led from the front of each band to a metal stylus attached to one of the cylinders on the cart, which had been wheeled between the chairs. Neither child uttered a word but each watched anxiously.

"Don't worry, my fine gentlemen," said the professor. "This apparatus is quite harmless and will not cause you a soupçon of pain. It is called a pneumograph, and it measures the degree of inspiration and expiration at any given time. That's a fancy way of saying, it measures how much air you breathe in and out." He nodded to his assistants. "Switch on the battery, if you please, Mr. MacKenzie, so these poor chaps can see, there is nothing to fear."

The assistant turned on the battery, and the cylinder began to rotate slowly.

"First of all," said Broske, "we take a reading when the subject is breathing normally. Ah, there you are, the young negro's inspirations are rather shallow. The other boy's are more normal."

Murdoch was close enough to see that the stylus attached to the cylinder was making zigzags on the paper.

"Continue, gentlemen," said Broske to his assistants, and quickly they attached bands to the wrists of each boy and hooked the dangling wires to the stylus on the second cylinder. The professor called out to the assistant who was strapping the coloured boy's wrists to the arms of the chair, "That looks a little too loose. It needs to be quite snug."

The problem was corrected.

"Take a reading, if you please."

The assistant flicked another switch on the battery, and the cylinder began to move, the stylus making a similar pattern to that of the pneumograph.

"Excellent. Let that run for a moment or two. Now fasten the clamps."

The assistants brought forward two stands and placed them directly behind the chairs. Each was equipped with leather clamps.

"These are simple stands that photographers were in the way of using with their subjects when the taking of a photograph required the subject to be absolutely still for a rather long time," said Broske. "They ensured that nobody moved and blurred the shot. For the purposes of our experiment, it is important that the boys do not move their heads."

The boys were fastened into the clamps so that they were looking straight ahead. The cylinders continued to rotate.

"Now, my fine lads, I am going to ask each of you in turn some simple questions. All I want you to do is answer clearly and, of course, with truth. As you speak, the instruments will record your heartbeat and your breathing. That is it, no more and no less. Now then, our good Sambo here. What is your name?"

"Archie King, sir."

"Why are you living in the St. Nicholas home?"

"I am an orphan, sir."

"No parents? No papa or mamma?"

"No, sir. They're both dead since I was five."

"And from what did they die, young sir?" Broske's tone was jocular.

"I dunno 'zactly. I think it was fluenza."

"How long have you been in the orphanage then, young Archie?"

The boy paused. "Three years."

Broske was walking up and down in front of the two chairs while he was talking. He wasn't looking at the boys.

"And our little blond friend. What is your name?"

"Jim Anderson, sir."

"And why are you in the orphanage, Jimmy?"

"My father was took with the consumption, and my mam couldn't look after us good enough so she placed us at St. Nick's. She's coming to get me and me sister as soon as she can."

"How commendable."

The professor turned around and briefly inspected the recordings on the cylinders. He addressed the coloured boy.

"Are you happy at the orphanage, young Archie?"

"Oh yes, sir. Quite happy."

Suddenly, Broske leaned over the boy. His expression changed to one of utter ferocity and he bellowed, "Liar! How dare you think you can deceive me!"

Archie was powerless to move away.

The professor's face was only a few inches away from the boy's. He yelled, "Your parents died from whisky poisoning, not influenza."

Archie tried to shake his head, but he couldn't.

"I don't--"

"Be quiet! You are going to tell me nothing but lies. How can a happy boy set fires?"

Archie's eyes were wide with terror and his bottom lip started to tremble.

"Your superintendent told me you set a fire to one of the rooms. Isn't that true?"

"No, sir. I never did."

"Liar again. Tell me the truth."

"It is the truth, sir." Archie tried to shrink away. "I never set no fire."

Broske swirled around and spoke to the other boy. However, this time his voice was at a normal pitch.

"Jimmy, tell me. Is your friend, Archie King, a liar?"

The boy looked terrified and stuttered out, "I, I...don't know, sir."

The professor stared at him for a few moments, then he beamed, stepped away from Archie, went over to Jimmy, and ruffled his hair.

"Enough. I shall not maintain this misery a moment longer. You and Archie have been most helpful in my little demonstration, and as I promised, you shall get the best supper of your lives. Mr. MacKenzie, Mr. Sutherland, you can disengage the apparatus now."

They removed the clamps and bands that were holding the boys, neither of whom moved from their chair. Broske picked up a wooden pointer. His audience remained silent.

"I will now show you the results of the pneumograph and the pulsometer." The assistants removed the roll of paper from each cylinder and stretched them out. "When I berated Archie, his inspiration was sharp and sudden, as you can see here on the graph." He tapped the spot with his pointer. "Interestingly, the expiration did not immediately follow. The lad was actually holding his breath for a few moments. This is a typical response to fear." Another tap. "Then there were four more quick inspirations, each quite shallow. Also typical. You can see here on the graph where the heartbeat jumped considerably. That was, of course, when I raised my voice and startled him. It continued to beat rapidly." He pointed to the second roll. "Now, here are the results from young Jim Anderson. You can compare the

two. His pulse rate increased when he witnessed his pal getting what he believed to be a severe scolding. Then when I asked him a question, no doubt anticipating he would be likewise treated, his breathing became rapid. Not as much so as the other boy, but certainly considerably more than before."

Murdoch thought his own heart rate had increased when the professor had raised his voice so unexpectedly. He wondered if Dr. Ogden's had. He'd have to ask her.

Broske continued. "Archie King, the coloured child, is by virtue of his race disposed to be fearful and sensitive. If I had reversed the order of scolding, his pulse would probably have accelerated at a greater rate even than that of the other boy. But they are good lads. I have known grown men fare worse, involuntarily evacuating their bladder and even bowels. Now, are there any questions?"

A veritable forest of hands shot up, but Murdoch didn't have the opportunity to hear what the students wanted to know. A familiar figure, large and imposing in his cape and policeman's helmet, had appeared in the aisle beside him. It was Constable Crabtree. He leaned over and whispered in Murdoch's ear.

"I'm sorry to interrupt, Mr. Murdoch, but an urgent call has just come through to the station. A man's body has been discovered over on Mutual Street. It looks to be a homicide. Sergeant Seymour has sent Constable Fyfer over to investigate, but he thought you should go too. He seemed to think you wouldn't mind too much at being called away."

Murdoch grimaced. Seymour had heard him moaning about having to accompany Dr. Ogden to some bloody silly lecture. He tapped her on the arm.

"I'm afraid I have to leave, ma'am. A police matter."

"What a pity."

Some of the nearby students gazed curiously as he stood up, but the others were completely absorbed by an

animated discussion with the professor. The two boys remained in their chairs, and Murdoch was close enough to the stage to see the tear stains marking the coloured boy's cheeks. His fellow orphan looked pale.

Murdoch followed Crabtree out of the hall.

"I just hope those lads stuff themselves."

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"Never mind, George. I'll tell you about it later."

CHAPTER THREE

Once outside the building, Murdoch took a deep breath of the cool night air, which had the merest hint of spring. The macadam was glistening in the lamplights from a recent rain.

"Where are we going?"

"The stables are at 73 Mutual Street."

They set off at a brisk pace along Gerrard Street, quiet at this time of the evening.

"Boring talk, was it, sir?"

"Far from it. It was quite riveting, really. Blood, drama, suspense. What more could you ask for? A damn theatre couldn't have provided more entertainment."

Crabtree gave him a curious glance. "Like that, was it, sir? That's medical students for you."

Murdoch shuddered. "All right, George, tell me what you know about the case."

"Not much more than I've said, sir. The victim is a man named Daniel Cooke, who owns a livery stable on Mutual Street. It was one of his stable hands that found him. There's a telephone in the office, so he called us right away."

"Why does that name sound familiar?"

"About three months ago we received complaints that one of his cabbies was mistreating the horses."

"That's right, I remember now. You investigated, didn't you, George? What came of it?"

"Nothing really, sir. I met Cooke the once when I went to check things out, and he seemed a bit jumpy but that could have been nerves. You know how people can get when they see a police officer. He owns about a dozen horses, as I recall, and they all seemed in good health. Not that I am an equine connoisseur, you understand, but there wasn't enough evidence to lay a charge."

"And no identity of the complainant?"

"No. It was a man's voice, but he refused to say who he was. He called three times, I believe. I thought somebody was just making mischief."

"Did Cooke have a family?"

"I don't know if he had children, but there is a Mrs. Cooke. I met her too. Quite a tigress, I must say. She was furious about the accusations, might ruin their reputation, that sort of thing. She didn't seem that concerned whether they were true. She made all sorts of unpleasant threats to me as if I was the one responsible for stirring up trouble. It was no use trying to explain to her I was only doing my job."

"How old a man was Mr. Cooke?"

"He was getting on. He'd be close to sixty."

They continued in silence for a little while. The street gas lamps were lit and most of the houses, elegant in this part of town, glowed with light. In some of the houses, the blinds weren't drawn, and the rooms were as illuminated as brilliantly as a stage. In one drawing room, a white-haired man, dressed in evening clothes, was waltzing slowly with a woman, also elderly, who was smiling up into his face. The light from the chandelier glinted on a brilliant jewel in her hair. They must have recently returned from some fancy affair. Murdoch was tempted to stop and watch them complete the dance, they looked so good together. A maid

and a butler, also older, were standing at the edge of the room.

Murdoch was touched by the apparent affection between the dancers. He'd become rather interested in observing married couples, he realized, ever since he had proposed marriage to Miss Amy Slade.

Crabtree and Murdoch turned down Jarvis Street, and here most of the houses were protected from curious eyes by firmly closed blinds or curtains.

"I'm surprised that we're being called to this area of town. On Mutual and Shuter Streets, there's a physician living in every second house."

"And as we all know, only the poorer classes of society commit crimes," added Crabtree. He'd made his tone heavily ironic, and Murdoch grinned at him.

"There's Fyfer."

The constable was standing at the corner of a laneway. There was a high wooden fence behind him, which Murdoch assumed hid the livery. As they approached, Fyfer saluted.

"Good evening, sir."

"Evening, Fyfer. How do we get in?"

"There's a side entry just down here."

Fyfer lit the way down the dark laneway with his lantern. They stepped through the door into a cobblestone yard. There were no lights.

"The body's in the barn. There are two entrances for the carriages, and I barred those gates right away. Nobody has come or gone since I've been here."

"Where's the fellow who found the body?"

"I've put him in the office. It's right there."

He flashed his light. The office was just inside the south gate, and the side that faced into the yard was glassed. Murdoch could barely make out the figure of a man sitting at the desk. He didn't move or make any attempt to come out to them.

"Have you talked to him yet?"

“Just a few questions. His name’s Elijah Green and he cleans out the stables. We didn’t go much further than that.”

Murdoch had worked with Fyfer before, and he’d grown to respect the young man’s efficiency. He was also well aware that the constable’s good manners covered a ruthless ambition. Kid gloves over a tiger’s paw.

“Good. All right, lead on.”

Fyfer opened the door to the barn and they went in.

“He’s in the tackle room, sir.”

He turned to the left and led the way along the centre aisle, which was also cobbled and lightly covered with straw. There was a warm, not unpleasant smell of hay and manure in the air and the lantern’s bull’s-eye beam picked out the rear ends of horses in open stalls. One or two of them nickered as the men went past.

“In here.” Fyfer pushed open a door at the far end of the aisle and stood back for Murdoch to enter the room.

A brass lamp sat on a low stool in the corner. By its light, Murdoch could see the body of a man hanging by the wrists from a strap hooked into the ceiling. He was twisting slightly, and his feet dangled in the straw. The sharp reek of vomit filled the air.

Murdoch went in closer, and Fyfer aimed his beam at the body.

The man’s blue eyes were open and staring and he was naked from the waist up, his back criss-crossed with livid marks. Blood had clotted along the lines and pooled at his waist. Buzzing flies fed greedily on the wounds.

Murdoch drew in his breath. “Good Lord, he’s been whipped.”

“Yes, sir. Quite viciously, too, by the look of it.”

Murdoch walked slowly around the body. “Are we certain this is Daniel Cooke?”

“I recognize him myself,” said Crabtree, who was standing near the door.

In life, Cooke was slightly above average height. Not as tall as Murdoch, perhaps just under six feet. He had a full head of wavy grey hair and heavy sidewhiskers. He was overweight, his flabby pale flesh spilling over the band of his trousers. Vomit streaked his chest.

Murdoch placed the back of his hand against the dead man's cheek. The skin retained some warmth. Gently, he turned Cooke's jaw to the side. It moved easily.

"He hasn't been dead long at all. No rigor mortis and he's not completely cold." He turned to Fyfer. "Where are his clothes?"

"His jacket, shirt, and underwear are over there in that corner. They look as if they were cut away."

"Your light, please." Murdoch went over to the pile of clothes and examined them. There was a brown check wool jacket, a blue striped shirt, and a grey cotton undershirt. All were in shreds, but it was obvious they had been cut, not torn.

"I thought the assailant must have had a sharp knife and a strong hand to cut through the jacket so cleanly," said Fyfer.

Murdoch nodded and began to search through the jacket pockets. They were empty except for a handkerchief and two nickel pieces.

"Was that lamp here?"

"Yes, sir, and it was lit, just the wick turned down low."

"Shall we get him down now?" Crabtree asked.

"One minute."

Murdoch shone the beam around the area. The shelves around the walls were loaded with horse tackle, bulky collars mostly. Bridles and harnesses dangled from hooks in the ceiling out of the way of mice and rats. Nothing seemed out of place, that is if you discounted the half-naked body.

He waved the flies away and studied the stripes. They covered his entire back but seemed heavier near the middle. It was impossible without a magnifying glass to tell

with any accuracy how many times Cooke had been whipped, but it was a considerable number.

"I'm surprised nobody heard him," said Crabtree. "He must have been screaming."

Murdoch turned up the wick in the brass lamp as high as it would go and set it on the floor. "There are bruises at the corners of his mouth. I'd say he was screaming, but he was gagged with something that was removed. I'll need your knife, George. You'll both have to take up some of the weight."

The two constables had the unpleasant task of clasping the dead man while they lifted him up and Murdoch cut through the strap tying Cooke to the hook. Finally, the body collapsed, and they lowered it gently to the ground. Murdoch knelt and cut the binding at the wrists and the arms flopped away helplessly.

He examined the strip of leather that had bound Cooke's wrists.

"It's a lead shank, by the look of it. The clip is still attached. It's been sliced cleanly at one end. There should be more of it. Do you see anything, gentlemen?"

The room was small, and all three of them searched quickly, but there was no sign of the remaining piece of leather. Murdoch put the strip on top of Cooke's clothes to be examined later.

"What do you think happened, sir?" asked Fyfer.

"I wish I knew. The man was no youngster, but he was still strong by the look of him. There must surely have been more than one person to be able to overcome him...Wait a minute, I see he's got another wound on his head. It's not very deep so it probably wasn't that hard a blow. Maybe enough to stun him, certainly knock him down. If you take a man by surprise, it's not that difficult to pin him if he's on the ground. Perhaps I'm wrong and there was just one assailant."

"Do you think he was attacked in this room?" asked Fyfer.

"I can't say at the moment. We'll have to wait to find out when we have some daylight. All right, we'd better get the wheels of justice in motion. George, go back to the medical school and see if you can bring Dr. Ogden here. Fyfer, you might as well start rounding up a jury so they're at the ready. I'll stay here for now and have a word with the man who found the body before I inform Mrs. Cooke."

"I'm here, sir."

Murdoch hadn't heard him approach, as he was standing in the shadows just outside the door. He stepped more into the light, and Murdoch realized he was a negro.

"I was wondering when I could get on with my job." He avoided looking into the tack room. "The horses need their feed and I've got to muck out."

His tone was neutral, neither overly polite nor provocative, but Fyfer didn't like it and he said sharply, "You'll get on with your job when we tell you you can. Detective Murdoch here wants to ask you some questions first."

The man blinked at the retort, but there was no other expression on his face.

"All right," said Murdoch. "Speaking of jobs, why don't you two get on with yours. Green, will you bring me a blanket so I can cover Mr. Cooke's body?"

"Yes, sir."

He disappeared into the gloom.

"Mr. Murdoch, I wonder if I might have a word with you before I get going," said Fyfer.

"Does Crabtree need to be here?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Off with you then, George," said Murdoch, and the constable left.

Fyfer lowered his voice. "I have serious misgivings about the darkie, sir. There are two things that don't sit right as far

as I am concerned. First, he seems unnaturally composed. You know darkies are usually very emotional, but he is as calm as anybody I've ever seen, given he just discovered the body of his employer in what I'd call a gruesome state. I myself even found it hard to look at him at first." He hesitated and gave a nervous little flick of his moustache. "Secondly, he told me this isn't his usual night to come to work. Somebody else mucks out the stables on Wednesdays, which is a day when they close early. I think it's too much of a coincidence that he comes this night of all nights. He'd know there was no risk of running into one of the cabbies, for instance. You know how easy it is for somebody to pretend to be the one who has discovered the body and, in fact, they're the one who made it a body, so to speak."

He was quite right about that, and Murdoch had also wondered about Green's lack of distress. At that moment, he saw the man in question had come up with a horse blanket over his arm. Damn, the fellow moved quietly.

"All right, Fyfer, I'll bear what you said in mind. You'd better get hopping. Keep the jurors in the yard until I tell you. Get them subpoenaed as fast as you can. Roust them out of bed if you have to."

The constable saluted and left.

"Give me the blanket," said Murdoch to Green. He went into the room and covered Cooke's body, then stood for a moment.

"May the Lord have mercy upon your soul."

He made the sign of the cross, aware that the stable hand was watching him from the doorway. He turned around.

"If it's that important that the horses are looked after, I don't doubt you can work and answer questions at the same time. Let's close this door and you get started with your chores. I'll follow you around and talk to you."

CHAPTER FOUR

Green stuck a pail underneath the spout and started to pump out water. Murdoch stopped him and took the handle.

"I'll do this. How many do you need?"

"Each horse gets one pail full, and we've got a dozen horses."

"Bring them then. I'll man the pump."

Green did as he was told, and for the next while they worked together, the stable hand carrying the pails to and from the stalls.

"How long have you been working for Mr. Cooke?"

"Twenty years."

"And how old are you now?"

"Thirty-six."

Murdoch had thought he was younger than that. He was wearing a snug-fitting woollen jersey, which revealed thick strong arms and wide shoulders, and his movements were easy and lithe. He was standing close to the hanging lantern and Murdoch noticed he had a small lump over his left eyebrow.

"How'd you get the goose egg?"

Green grimaced. "I bumped into a low-hanging beam. You'd think I'd know better by now, but it gets me all the

time." He went into one of the stalls and, shoving the horse aside with his shoulder, poured the water into the trough.

"Was Mr. Cooke a good boss?" Murdoch asked.

"As good as any, I suppose."

"That sounds as if you didn't much care for him."

"Did it? It wasn't meant to. I was his hired hand. It was a business arrangement."

"Any idea who might have attacked him?"

Green concentrated on his task. "None at all."

Murdoch felt exasperated with the man's apparent indifference.

"Aren't you worried about your job now that he's gone?"

"Stable hands are always in demand." He put down the pail and stroked the horse's neck as it drank.

"I get the impression you'd miss these horses if you had to move," said Murdoch.

"I'm not sure you're right about that, sir. It'd be foolish to get attached to cab horses. They don't last long after they come here." He bent down and ran his hand over the horse's hock, clicking his tongue softly. "Bendigo's got a bit of swelling there. I'll have to put a poultice on it. He probably should have a rest tomorrow, but he won't get it." He stopped.

Murdoch prompted, "Why won't he?"

"Mr. Musgrave usually has him and he's hard on his horses. Some cabbies won't make the horse canter, especially at the end of the day, but he'll always whip them up if it means an extra nickel."

He came out of the stall and picked up another pail of water.

"Was Mr. Cooke a man of regular habits?"

"Very regular. He was here without fail, rain or shine, summer and winter, by nine o'clock in the morning. He'd leave for his dinner at midday, come back no later than two, then stay until his supper at half past six. One hour and a half for his meal, then back here until the last cab checked

in, which might be about half-past eleven. Except for the Sabbath, when nobody works, and Wednesday, when the last cab has to be back by eight. He liked to supervise the comings and goings."

"What about you? What sort of hours do you keep?"

"I come in round about six or half past six in the morning. I've got to feed and water the horses, then harness up those that are going out. I gets my supper at about the same time as Mr. Cooke, then I come back to clean out the carriages and tend to the horses." He brought the empty pail over to the pump and waited while Murdoch filled it. "I finish by eleven o'clock most nights."

"Those are policeman's hours."

"Are they? But like I said, I ain't usually in Wednesdays or Sundays."

Murdoch finished pumping. "That's the twelfth, by my count. I'll do it. Where do you want it?"

He picked up the heavy bucket.

"Amber's the only one left," said Green. "She's in the last stall."

The horse was a knock-kneed roan mare who pawed the ground and tossed her head as Murdoch stepped into the stall. Suddenly, she kicked out with her rear leg, just missing him but landing on the pail, sending it flying. The water splashed over his trousers and boots, soaking them.

"Whoa there." He backed out quickly.

Green came over at once. "I should've told you not to get too close, sir. She's a mean one, that. Don't like nobody coming up behind her."

Murdoch felt like a fool. He'd worn his best clothes and boots for the lecture and now look at them.

"Damn. You should have warned me."

"Beg pardon, sir. Sometimes she's like that, sometimes she ain't." Green took a piece of grubby towelling from the rail and handed it to him. "Why don't you go into the office and dry off properly. Mr. Cooke has an oil heater in there."

Murdoch figured Crabtree would be returning with Dr. Ogden in about half an hour, but he expected they'd be in the barn for some time longer. He didn't fancy standing around with sopping-wet trousers.

"Have you got the key?"

"It's not locked."

"Never or just tonight?"

"Tonight. When I found him I ran to the telephone. I 'spected I'd have to break in, but the door was open. Mr. Cooke always kept it locked. He was nervous 'bout thieves."

Murdoch dabbed at his trousers with the towel. "So far the key hasn't shown up."

Green frowned. "That so?"

"Which way did you come in?"

"Through the west side entry door. I do have a key to that."

"Who else does?"

"Just me and Thomas Talbert. He helps out on Wednesdays and Sundays."

"Not the cabbies?"

"No, sir."

"What about the office?"

"Nobody but Mr. Cooke had that."

"I'll need the names and addresses of the rest of the cabbies and also your helper's."

"I'll give you Thomas's, but you'll have to look in Mr. Cooke's files for the others."

Murdoch scrutinized him for a moment, but his head was turned away and revealed nothing.

"I'd better go and dry off a bit."

Green pointed. "You can get to the office through the passageway down there. You don't mind if I get on, do you?"

"No. I'll come back to you later."

Murdoch picked up one of the lanterns and, making sure to keep to the middle of the centre aisle in case he drew the

ire of other fractious mares, he went in the direction Green had indicated. His boots squelched as he walked.

The door to the office was ajar and he stepped in, holding the lantern up high. It was a small room, better furnished than his own cubicle at the station. An oil heater was in the opposite corner from a safe, and the room was warm and the air redolent with the smell of good tobacco.

Murdoch sat down on a well-padded chair, pulled off his boots and socks, and placed them on top of the heater. He wrung a little more water out of his trousers. Blasted horse.

A rough sisal carpet on the plank floor scratched his bare feet as he padded over to the long bank of windows facing into the stable yard. From his desk, Cooke would have had a perfect view of the comings and goings of his employees. The desk had once been a fine mahogany one, but the surface was scarred with marks from matches allowed to burn down, and there was a light film of dust over everything and clumps of cigar ash. In the left corner was a clean, dust-free circle where he assumed the lamp now in the tack room had stood. On the right were several papers on a spike, a new-looking telephone, and an open box of cigars, half empty. Murdoch flipped through the papers briefly. They all seemed to be invoices, but he'd examine them more carefully later. He turned and swung the lantern in an arc around the room. There were two doors: one that led to the passage into the stables and the other likely to the street. He walked over to check. It was not locked and opened directly onto Mutual Street. He assumed Cooke had entered the livery stable this way, as it was the most direct. Was this where he'd received the blow to his head? Murdoch brought the lantern close to the floor, but the sisal was too rough to show any sign of a man being dragged. How had his assailant got in, and how had he got Cooke into the tackle room?

A pungent smell wafted over from the oil heater and he went to check on his socks. Not dry yet.

The large, elaborately decorated safe was locked. Next to it was a wooden filing cabinet. Murdoch opened a couple of drawers and found them untidily stuffed with papers. A cursory examination showed they were also business invoices. Hanging on a hook next to the cabinet was a clipboard with a pencil tied to it.

Murdoch unhooked the clipboard and checked the piece of paper. Today's date was at the top, Wednesday, April 15, and underneath several scrawled signatures. In the column next to their names, the cabbies had written the time of taking out the carriages and the time of return. The third column was initialled D.C. Only four carriages had gone out on the afternoon shift. Two of the cabbies, R. Littlejohn and J. Wallace, had signed off at 5:00 and 5:10 respectively. The last two names were R. Robson and P. Musgrave. The former had signed off at 7:00 and the latter at 7:25. Cooke had not initialled these names.

A flash of light outside the window caught Murdoch's eye. The side door across the yard opened and Constable Crabtree stepped in, dark lantern in his hand, followed by Dr. Ogden. Behind her, muffled in a black double-tiered cape, was Professor Broske.

Damn. They'd come sooner than he expected. He grabbed his damp socks.

CHAPTER FIVE

Murdoch went outside to greet the newcomers.

"I do hope you don't mind me coming along," said the professor. "Dr. Ogden thought I would find it interesting."

"Did she, indeed? This is a murder investigation after all, not a laboratory experiment."

Broske halted and lowered the hand he had already extended toward Murdoch. Dr. Ogden looked disapproving.

"Dr. Broske is a world-renowned expert in fear, William. When your constable said that the victim had probably died of fright, he was naturally most interested."

"Died of fright? We don't know that." He turned to Crabtree. "Why did you say such a thing, George?"

The constable seemed discomfited. "It's his eyes, sir. They're almost out of his head. In fact, begging your pardon, Dr. Ogden, what I said was, 'He looked as if he had died of shock. I didn't use the word *fright*.'"

It was Julia Ogden's turn to look embarrassed. "I suppose I was so caught up in Dr. Broske's lecture that I heard it as 'fright.' I'm sorry, professor. I have brought you here under false pretences."

"Not at all, madam. Let's save our judgment until we have examined the case further. I am more than happy to accompany you. I'm sure the learning will be all mine."

Murdoch watched this exchange in astonishment. The prim doctor of formidable intellect was behaving like a coy young girl. As for Broske, he was speaking to her and looking at her as if she were an object of great attraction. Dr. Ogden!

She met Murdoch's gaze and suddenly became brisk and businesslike again.

"Where is the body, William?"

"In the tack room, ma'am. Light us, George."

Crabtree led the way across the cobbled yard, which was slick and dotted with puddles. Broske offered Dr. Ogden his arm and she accepted. She was a good six inches taller than he and had to bend toward him to hear what he was saying.

"I mustn't forget to tell you the story of my poor Bertino and his open skull through which I could study the workings of the human brain for several weeks and what invaluable experiments I was able to conduct."

Her response was lost to Murdoch, who was opening the barn door. Elijah Green was mucking out one of the stalls. He straightened up when they came in, but he didn't approach them.

They all followed Crabtree down the centre aisle, Dr. Ogden lifting her skirt fastidiously. Murdoch ushered them into the tack room, knelt down beside the body, and removed the blanket. Cooke's staring, protuberant eyes did make him look extremely fearful. His mouth had dropped open and his fingers had curled. Murdoch beckoned to Crabtree and they rolled the body to its side so they could see the back.

"Goodness me!" exclaimed the doctor. "How extraordinary."

Broske fished in his pocket and, crouching down, fixed his monocle and looked at the wounds.

"Definitely a lash of some kind and it was wielded with great ferocity. It 'as broken through the flesh in several

places.”

Dr. Ogden also bent down beside the body, and Broske offered her his monocle, which she used as a magnifying glass.

“Do you have the whip that was used, Mr. Murdoch?” she asked.

“No, ma’am. We haven’t had a chance to conduct a search yet.”

“I see he has also suffered a blow to his head on the top left side, but it looks superficial. However, I won’t know until I open up the skull. You can lower him now.” She peered closely at Cooke’s face. “There’s a cut in the corner of his mouth.”

“I believe he was gagged, ma’am.”

“He vomited quite copiously. He has not lost a lot of blood so I doubt he died from exsanguination. However, I suspect our constable was right, the cause of death may very well be shock. Poor fellow, he wasn’t a young man, was he? After a certain age, one would hope to die peacefully in one’s bed, wouldn’t you say, Dr. Broske?”

“Indeed I would, ma’am, but isn’t that both the terror and the marvel of life that we mere mortals have really so little choice in the matter?”

Murdoch agreed with him on that point. He was intrigued. Suddenly the professor seemed less like an implacable, self-important man of science and more of a philosopher. A definite improvement.

Dr. Ogden started to get to her feet and Broske helped her up.

“How close are we to getting the jury, William?” she asked.

“I don’t know, ma’am. George, can you find out? If Fyfer hasn’t got twelve men yet, beat the bushes until he has. Then one of you had better fetch the ambulance.”

“Yes, sir.”

"One of the more cumbersome of our Canadian practices, professor," said Dr. Ogden, "is that when there is a questionable death, the law insists on the coroner's jury viewing the body *in situ*. I wish I could start the post-mortem examination right away before rigor truly has its grip on him, but we have to wait until the jury is assembled and I can instruct them."

"I am not at all fatigued, I assure you, madam. Perhaps if there is nothing else for you to do at the moment, we could sit apart and I could tell you my long-postponed story."

She smiled. "I would like that." She turned to Murdoch. "Has the victim's family been notified?"

"Not yet. I will go to his home as soon as I can."

"You'll leave somebody in charge here, won't you?"

Murdoch groaned to himself. One characteristic of Dr. Ogden with which he was now familiar was her propensity to tell him how to do his job.

"I will make sure the place is quite secure if I am not here myself, ma'am."

She got his point and looked discomfited as she always did when caught out in her transgression. That was the counterbalance to her bossiness and kept Murdoch liking her.

"May I suggest you wait in Cooke's office, ma'am. You will be more comfortable there."

Once again, Broske offered her his arm. "That sounds like sound advice. Shall we?"

They all left the tack room, and as Dr. Ogden and the professor disappeared down the passageway, Murdoch turned, intending to go in search of Green. He didn't have to because the negro suddenly stepped out of the nearest stall. He had a horsewhip in his hand.

"I found this in here laying atop of the wheelbarrow." He handed it to Murdoch.

The leather had split near the end, revealing the whalebone underneath. All around the tear was stained a brownish red.

"Does it belong to the livery?"

"It might. I'll have to check the carriages. The cabbies are supposed to leave them in the brackets."

"Show me."

Green led the way to the carriage shed. There were five single-horse carriages and one two-horse lined up in a tight row against the far wall. The light from his lantern winked on the gilt lettering painted on the carriage doors, a big letter C and underneath the words *Cooke's Livery*. Murdoch was struck with how clean and well kept everything was.

"The whip is missing from number six carriage," said Green.

"Who had that one out?"

"I don't know without checking the list. They are parked in the order of coming in so number six would have been the last one."

"According to the sheet I was just looking at, that would have been P. Musgrave. He came in at twenty-five past seven, just after Robson."

Green nodded. "They both like to work until the last minute. Like I said, they were supposed to be all done, and the horses unharnessed and in their stalls by eight o'clock."

"Did either of these men have any enmity toward Mr. Cooke?"

"Not that I know of."

"Do you get along with them yourself?"

Green looked surprised by the question and, once again, Murdoch saw the wariness in his face.

"They's cabbies. As long as I do my job and make sure they've got clean carriages and fit horses to go out, we all get along."

Murdoch opened his notebook.

"Give me your address, will you?"

"Number 262, Terauley Street."

"Really? Bit of a haul, isn't it, to come over here?"

Green shrugged. "I'm used to it."

"What is the address of the man who spells you off? Thomas Talbert, you said?"

"That's right. He lives close by, at 33 Shuter Street."

At that moment, they heard Crabtree's sonorous voice. "Wait here until I come and fetch you. Remember you are subpoenaed and sworn, so don't think you can weasel out of your duty."

Murdoch closed the notebook. "The jurymen have arrived."

"Do you want me to stay here when I'm finished, or can I go home?"

"You'd better wait at least until Dr. Ogden has done her instruction and announces the date of the inquest. You'll be called as a witness. Oh and by the way, Green, I'm also looking for a piece of leather. I'd guess part of a lead shank. If you find anything like that, bring it to me."

"Yes, sir."

As they returned to the main barn, Dr. Ogden and Professor Broske emerged from the passageway, smiling at each other as if they had just shared a joke.

"I see the jurors have been gathered," said Dr. Ogden. She addressed Crabtree, who had come into the barn. "I assume you have a sufficient number?"

"Yes, ma'am. More than enough. We've sworn in thirteen."

"Good, bring them in then."

Crabtree went back to the yard and they heard him shouting.

"This way, gentleman. Through this door, step lively. The sooner we get started, the sooner you can go home. I'll read you the oath when we're in the room."

The men began to trickle into the barn, Crabtree and Fyfer behind them, rounding them up like so many cattle.

On the whole, they were an affluent-looking lot, which wasn't surprising given the area. Two soot-blackened navvies were also a part of the group somehow having fallen into Crabtree's net. The other men flowed around them like a river around a tree stump.

"This way, mind the horses."

Dr. Ogden in the lead, they all walked down to the tackle room.

Murdoch called out. "Ma'am, I must go and notify Mrs. Cooke."

"Very well. Your constable can inform you of the date of the inquest and I will be doing the post-mortem examination tomorrow. You will, no doubt, want to attend."

"I shall, ma'am."

"Good night then, Mr. Murdoch," said the professor. "I will probably have left by the time you return. I have to give another lecture tomorrow at a most uncivilized hour in the morning." He smiled. "In case you wondered, detective, it is the twin lecture to the one you were attending. I'm entitling it 'Courage.'"

"That sounds fascinating. I'm sorry I can't attend."

Murdoch tipped his hat and left. Speaking of courage, one of the most difficult things he was ever called upon to do was to tell a family member that a loved one had been murdered.

CHAPTER SIX

It was close to midnight by now, and Cooke's house was in darkness except for a solitary lamp in the doorway, presumably left burning for the master. Murdoch had no choice but to wake up the household. He had rung the doorbell a few times when he saw the gleam of a candle moving toward the entrance. Finally, the door was opened a crack and a sleepy-looking man, who had obviously dressed hastily, peered at him.

"What'd you want?"

"I'm Detective Murdoch from number four station and I must speak to Mrs. Cooke."

"The mistress? She's a-bed."

"I must ask you to wake her."

"Oh dear me. Has something happened to the master?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so."

"What?"

All of this conversation was conducted through the crack in the door.

"I'd like to come in, if you don't mind."

Under normal circumstances, the servant was clearly a man with a keen eye for protocol and proper position. He hesitated.

"Well, I don't know about that. How do I know who you are?"

"I just told you. Here is my card. Now, please do as I say. Does Mrs. Cooke have a personal maid?"

"Why, yes—"

"Wake her up also."

He had to push a little, but the man reluctantly stepped back and allowed him into the hall. The butler studied the calling card carefully.

"You'd better wait here then."

Murdoch had no intention of delivering his news in the hall.

"I think we'll all be more comfortable in the drawing room."

"We can't do that. There's no fire lit. Why? What's 'appened?" He had a Cockney accent that was becoming more pronounced as he became more distressed.

"I can't give you any information until I've spoken to Mrs. Cooke."

He looked frightened.

"Of course, sir. I'm sorry. Please don't think me impertinent, I'm just trying to do me job. Come this way. I'll have Lucy wake the mistress at once."

Murdoch heard a door opening overhead and a light appeared on the landing. A stout, grey-haired woman in a red satin wrapper was standing at the top of the stairs.

"What is it, Ferguson? What's going on?"

"A policeman wants to talk to you, madam. About the master."

She gave a little cry of alarm. "Something's happened, hasn't it? I knew it, I knew it. He'd never normally go rushing out like that without finishing his supper."

She hurried down the stairs, straight over to Murdoch, and caught him by the arm. "Something terrible's happened, hasn't it? I can see it in your face."

"Mrs. Cooke, er, I think you should sit down." There was a coat stand in the hall with a bench. Murdoch took the lamp from the woman's hand and gently guided her to the seat. The butler didn't move but stood clutching his candleholder, watching them.

"I'm Detective Murdoch, madam. I'm afraid I do have bad news...I am very sorry to have to tell you, but your husband, Daniel Cooke, is dead."

Her fingers flew to her mouth. "I knew it," she said again. "I knew there was trouble."

"What kind of trouble, Mrs. Cooke?" Murdoch asked.

"Somebody called at the house at suppertime with some kind of message. We hadn't even finished our meal, but Daniel, Mr. Cooke, got up at once. He said he had to go to the stable right away."

"Did he say why?"

A fleeting expression of anger passed across her face. "No, he did not. But ask Ferguson here. He was the one who brought in the letter."

Murdoch looked over at the butler, who became more jittery. "I don't know, I'm sure, sir. It was a sealed envelope that I handed him. I don't know what sort of message it was. I can say, though, sir, seeing as you are with the police, he did seem very upset by it."

He glanced at Mrs. Cooke furtively, as if he was being disloyal, but she nodded and said, "He turned quite white and I asks him, 'What's wrong, Daniel?' but he just jumped right up and says, 'I've got to go to the stable at once.'"

"Who brought the letter?"

"The porch was quite dark--"

"I told you to fix the lamp, Ferguson. How many times have I asked you to take care of it and now look what's happened."

Murdoch attributed the irrelevancy of this remark to shock on Mrs. Cooke's part. Certainly the reaction he'd

anticipated in a woman suddenly widowed hadn't yet occurred.

"I did repair the lamp, madam, but it's situated in such a way that at night the porch is quite shadowy--"

"Can you describe the messenger at all?" Murdoch interrupted.

"It was a young coloured man--"

"So it must have been Green," said Mrs. Cooke.

"No, madam. I was about to say, it wasn't anybody I'd seen before. Elijah Green would have identified himself anyways."

Murdoch made a point of opening his notebook. "It would be helpful if you could give me any details at all about this person, Mr. Ferguson." He could see that the old man actually trembled at the question.

"I'm afraid I wasn't paying a great deal of attention, and as I said the porch was dark."

"But you saw he was negro?"

"Yes, sir. He did have a white scarf wrapped around his face and a black fedora pulled down low, but I could see part of his forehead and the skin was dark."

"It wasn't just the shadows of the porch?"

"No, sir. Besides he sounded like a negro when he spoke. He had a Yankee accent. He had a sort of raspy voice too, rather as if he had a sore throat."

"What did he say?"

"Not much. 'Give this letter to Mr. Cooke right away,' or some such words." Ferguson pursed his lips, his nervousness momentarily superseded by his indignation. "He was quite rude, I thought. Not so much as a 'By your leave' or 'If you please.'"

"Can you say anything else about him? How tall, for instance? What else was he wearing?"

"He was about my height, I'd say, which is five feet, three inches. He had on a long black overcoat and the hat I mentioned, but that's all I noticed."

He was so worried, Murdoch almost patted him. "That's good, Mr. Ferguson. Thank you."

Mrs. Cooke got back into the picture. "He must have been luring my husband to the stable so he could rob him." She stood up. "I'll go there with you, Mr. Murdoch." She paused. "I suppose there's no doubt it is my husband who is dead?"

"The stable hand, Elijah Green, identified him and so did my constable."

"And where is the body?"

"At the moment it is still in the barn, but he will be moved to the funeral parlour as soon as the coroner has instructed the jury."

"I shall get dressed as quickly as I can and we can go to the stable. You'll no doubt need me to see what has been stolen."

Murdoch was taken aback. "Er, well, that would be helpful, ma'am."

She hadn't shown any curiosity at all about the way Cooke had died, but, giving her the benefit of the doubt, Murdoch decided not to go into details until she asked.

She started up the stairs, calling out to her butler, "Fetch Lucy to help me."

"Yes, madam."

The butler looked as if he was consumed with curiosity even if his mistress wasn't, but he had no choice but to do as she commanded. He scurried off down the hall with his candle, and Murdoch was left in the semi-darkness of the foyer. He opened the front door. Ferguson was right, the lamp wasn't adequate, but there was enough light to make his description of the unknown messenger credible and Murdoch thought he was telling the truth.

He took out his pipe, stuffed it with tobacco, and lit it, drawing in deeply. He would have preferred to wait until there was daylight to go back to the stables, but Mrs. Cooke

seemed quite determined. Down the street a cat yowled and was answered by the deep-throated bark of dog.

He wondered what sort of message the strange Yankee man had brought that would make Daniel Cooke abandon his dinner and run out. To his death.

As for Mrs. Cooke, he had never met a bereaved woman who seemed to grieve so little, but what that meant, he didn't yet know. For that matter, Ferguson hadn't been devastated either. Nor Elijah Green. What kind of man had Daniel Cooke been who left so little sorrow at his abrupt departure from this life?

For all her urgency, Mrs. Cooke took a long time to get dressed but eventually appeared properly pinned and corseted. When they got to the livery, the constable who was now on duty told them that Dr. Ogden, the professor, and the jury had left and Crabtree had removed the body and transported it to Humphrey's Funeral Parlour. Mrs. Cooke headed straight for the office.

She knew the combination to the safe and, at her command, Murdoch opened it at once. She gasped.

"The money's gone."

There was a five-dollar bill and a cardboard box tied with a shoelace and labelled *bills* lying in the bottom of the safe, but that was all.

"How much money was there, ma'am?"

"Yesterday he told me he had four hundred and five dollars in the strong box. I told him he should take it over to the bank, but he said he'd go later this week. Now see what's happened. We've been robbed."

She suddenly burst into tears. She was certainly showing more grief at the loss of the money than the loss of her husband, Murdoch thought, but again he excused her. People often behaved strangely when they were most upset. He waited for a moment for her to calm herself.

"Did anybody else know the combination to the safe other than you and your husband?"

"Nobody. You can't be too careful, we always said. But that darkie must have forced him to open it and then he took the money and killed Daniel." She looked vaguely around the office. "Where did you find him?"

"His body was in the stable." Murdoch wasn't sure she was ready yet to hear the facts. "Is there anything else missing, Mrs. Cooke?"

She came over to the desk and opened first one drawer and then the other. "His revolver's gone."

"He kept a revolver?"

"He stayed late at the stables almost every night. Cabbies can be a rough lot. We both felt it was safer for him to be armed. Only a few months ago, he surprised a burglar and he purchased the gun after that."

Murdoch took out his notebook. "Could you describe the revolver to me, Mrs. Cooke?"

"I certainly can. We discussed at length what was the best for his purpose. He finally decided on a bulldog, thirty-two calibre. It was nickel-plated and had a rubber stock."

"Thank you, ma'am. That is excellent. Did he always keep the gun in the desk?"

She averted her eyes. "Let's put it this way, Mr. Murdoch. My husband believed in keeping his work life and his home life quite separate. I can count on one hand the number of times I have been here. I did visit him one evening not so long ago and took him by surprise. He had the gun in his hand when I came into the office." She chuckled in an awkward sort of way. "We made quite the joke of it afterwards. He replaced the gun in that drawer, I do remember that."

"And did he lock the drawer?"

"I don't recall. But he did always made sure the office door was locked."

"There was no key on his person that we have discovered, ma'am. It's possible he dropped it somewhere in the barn. We will look in the morning."

"There were two on the ring. The office key and the master key to the side doors."

Murdoch made a note. "Did he report the previous incident to the police, ma'am?"

"No, he didn't. I told him he should have, but nothing was taken and he said he hadn't got a good look at the man anyway. He was too soft-hearted, is the truth. Didn't want to bring in trouble. He thought it might give other people ideas."

"Perhaps we could both take a look around the room, while you are here, just in case he did put the gun somewhere else and in case you notice anything else out of place."

"Very well."

There really wasn't anywhere else to look. There was nothing in the bookcase or the filing cabinet. However, in the lower drawer of the desk, Murdoch found a pile of racing forms. They went back several months and were heavily marked and notated.

"Mr. Cooke liked to gamble, did he, ma'am?"

She saw what he was referring to and she frowned. "He was a man who made his living by hiring out horses. Occasionally he could get a rundown racehorse for a reasonable price. They make good cab horses."

She'd come up with that answer pretty quickly, thought Murdoch, who didn't think comments such as "Closing fast in last race," "Likes slop," and "Now's the time" were about potential cab horses.

The search was soon completed, and Mrs. Cooke declared that as far as she knew nothing else had been taken. She returned to the safe and gave a cursory glance at the box of bills. She looked far worse now than she had when he first brought her the bad news. Even in her youth,

Murdoch doubted she had ever been an attractive woman. Her chin and nose were too coarse for beauty, and a long-standing petulance had etched lines between her eyes.

She put the five-dollar bill in her reticule. "I'll take this."

"Do you have an objection if I take the box with me, ma'am?"

For a moment, she looked uneasy. "I cannot imagine it will be of any help. It just contains bills of sale."

"Everything we can learn about your husband's affairs might help," said Murdoch, and not giving her much chance to protest further he picked up the cardboard box, scooped the papers off the spike on the desk, and put them inside.

"It is obvious a thief lured him away on some pretext," she continued. "I assume he was shot?"

"As a matter of fact, ma'am, we are not sure at this moment what caused his death...he'd been tied up. I hate to have to tell you this, Mrs. Cooke, but he'd been whipped."

She gaped at him. "Whipped? What on Earth do you mean?"

"His jacket and shirt were cut off and his assailant horse-whipped him."

She sat down abruptly on the chair by the door. "Why would anybody do that?"

"I don't know, ma'am. Did your husband have any enemies that you were aware of?"

"None. He was very well liked. You can ask his employees. They were very loyal. What a dreadful, dreadful thing. To take all of our money is bad enough, but to hurt him in that way..."

Murdoch wished he had insisted on Mrs. Cooke's maid accompanying them, but she had refused, saying she didn't want Nosy Parkers involved in her business. As Lucy was well within earshot, Murdoch thought Mrs. Cooke was being unduly rude.

"Let me accompany you home, ma'am. We will continue the investigation tomorrow. Is there a friend or relative you

would like me to send for to stay with you?"

"No. My servants will take care of me. That's what I pay them for, isn't it?"

Murdoch had no answer to that so he offered her his arm and, pulling on it rather heavily, she got to her feet.

"I realize you must do your job, but I hope you don't intend to close the stable for more than a morning. The cabbies need to go about their business. It is their livelihood, after all."

"Yes, ma'am. I quite understand. And speaking of that, I need a list of their names and addresses."

She pointed at the filing cabinet. "There's a ledger in the bottom drawer. They're in there."

"Thank you, ma'am. And I promise you, we will do our best to move quickly."

"I would expect as much," she said.

CHAPTER SEVEN

AUGUST 1858

In the month since she had been abducted, she had learned to keep her eyes averted and her head slightly inclined, and she did that now as she and her captors approached the porch.

“Here she is, ma’am.”

The woman was lying on a lounge chair, covered with a shawl even though it was a hot, muggy afternoon. Her untidily pinned hair was quite grey, and her skin seemed deadly white, her eyes deeply shadowed. A girl with dark skin was standing behind her, cooling her with a large palm fan.

“What’s her name?” the woman asked.

She spoke in a quiet, enervated voice that had an unusual twang.

“She was last called Lena, ma’am. She’s been a lady’s maid before and can sew beautifully, dress hair in the best style, and is quiet and docile as a kitten.”

“Kittens scratch.” This remark came from another woman who was seated near the door. Lena managed a quick glance in her direction. She was younger with a thin, pinched face. Her brown hair was pulled down smooth and

tight from a straight centre parting in the current fashion, and the severity of it did not enhance her looks.

"A figure of speech only, ma'am," Prescott gave Lena a poke in the ribs. "Come on, girl. Tell Mrs. Dickie that you're a good girl."

She curtsied. "I'm a good girl, ma'am. I won't be any trouble."

The younger woman snorted. "My, aren't we la-di-da. Where *did* she come from, Prescott?"

"She belonged to an English lady, ma'am. Over in Ohio. Must've picked up the way of talking from her. Her missus'd never have sold her 'cept she was going back to the homeland."

"I think you should reconsider, mother. You know what trouble these high-yaller girls are. They think they're better than anybody else and the others get fussed and come complaining all the time. It's so tiresome."

Prescott addressed Mrs. Dickie. "What's it to be then, ma'am? I can get a good price for her anywhere if you don't want her."

The older woman gave a weak wave. "Come over here, girl. Let me look at you." Lena walked over to the couch. "Kneel down, you're so tall you're making my neck crick by looking up at you...that's better. Now let me see your hands."

Lena held her hands out, palms up.

"Yes, they are soft. You're not lying about that Prescott. No, don't protest. You know perfectly well you'd pass off a mule as an Arabian if you could get away with it. Now, girl, let's see you smile. You're much too solemn. I can't have gloomy faces around me, only sunny ones. Isn't that right, Fidelia?"

The coloured girl beamed a dazzling white smile, marred only by a partly chipped front tooth.

"Yes, missus."

Lena forced herself to smile, and the woman looked at her critically.

"Much better. You're quite pretty with a happy expression. What do you think, Leigh? Caddie? Turn around, child, and show them how you can smile."

Lena did so. A man spoke.

"I think she'll do as well as any other, mamma. You are in need of a maid."

Lena hadn't noticed him at first, as he was standing at the far end of the porch. He was short, running to fat, with thinning hair, although he was probably still in his twenties.

The young woman who'd been addressed as Caddie frowned. "I tell you she'll cause trouble."

The man shrugged indifferently. "I don't give a fig either way. It is up to mamma."

Mrs. Dickie waved her hand in Prescott's direction. "I like her. It's settled then. Fidelia, you can take her to the cabin and show her where she'll sleep." She touched Lena's cheek with her dry finger. "Are you hungry, child?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Beulah will fix you something. Come back in here in about an hour. Can you tell the time?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Good. Now, Mr. Prescott, come around to the back and my son will settle up with you. Leigh, deduct at least twenty dollars from what he asks. He's a rogue through and through."

The slave trader tipped his hat. "Thank you, ma'am."

Lena felt a pang of fear. How bizarre that she should feel afraid seeing him go, but she did. He was the only link to her real life. He was the only one who knew who she was and where she came from. But even as she saw him bowing, grinning, ignoring her, she knew how foolish it was even to suppose for a moment he would tell the truth. She'd tried that on the steamer, she'd tried to talk to the captain, but Prescott had pulled her away. Later, he'd punched her so

hard in the ribs that she couldn't breathe. He said if she did that again, he'd have her taken off to the loony bin and she could scream and carry on there until she went grey and they would never believe her because everybody in that place said they were somebody else. "You'll be chained up and starved and beaten, and if you think your husband will find you, he might as well look for a needle in a whole barn of straw because he never will."

That kept her silent even more than fear of the pain he could inflict. If she was at least visible to normal people, to civilized people, she might eventually be found.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Murdoch entered the house as quietly as he could. An oil lamp was burning low on the hall table, but there were no lights showing underneath the doors leading from the hallway. It was past one o'clock in the morning and everybody was sensibly asleep. He hung up his hat and coat, yawning enough to dislocate his own jaw. He stood still for a moment. He was so used to coming into the house and listening for Arthur Kitchen, his former landlord, it had become a habit. This time he was making sure no wail of a babe woken prematurely tore the air. Katie, one of his fellow boarders, had warned him that her twins were coming down with the sniffles.

He reached for the lamp and noticed there was a letter beside it. It was one he'd received from Beatrice Kitchen that morning and he must have left it in the kitchen. He put it in his pocket and started up the stairs, stepping carefully over the second step from the top, which always creaked badly. He should see to it. He was nominally the landlord now. When the Kitchens had moved to Muskoka in a desperate search for a cure for Arthur's consumption, Murdoch had agreed to stay on in the house, rent-free, and look after the new tenants. Murdoch smiled to himself. Mrs. Kitchen, bless her heart, would probably be saying a dozen

novenas if she knew what had developed in the household. In the front parlour were Katie and her twin boys. She had considered herself married and then, abruptly, a widow, but it transpired the marriage was a bigamous one, making her children bastards. Not that anybody in his house was going to bruit that abroad. Charlie Seymour, a fellow officer at number four station, was renting one of the upstairs rooms, and Murdoch was sure the once-confirmed bachelor was smitten by the young woman. She was a sweet-natured girl who also happened to be an excellent cook, so Murdoch wasn't surprised Charlie was feeling the way he did. What would distress dear Mrs. Kitchen more than anything else, however, was the presence of the third boarder, Miss Amy Slade, schoolteacher, ardent and unapologetic New Woman, atheist, and the object of Murdoch's affections.

At the top of the landing, he could see that the door to his little sitting room was open and the soft glow of a candle spilled out. He walked quietly down the landing and went in.

Amy was sitting in the armchair fast asleep. She was in her dressing gown, her hair in a night braid. He stood for a moment, still at the stage of love when it is a delight to study the sleeping face of your beloved and marvel at its mystery. Even in the shadowy candlelight, the softness of her well-shaped lips were visible and stirred him.

Suddenly she opened her eyes with a gasp. "Will, you startled me. What are you doing standing there?"

"Looking at you."

"For how long?"

"Only a moment."

"Thank goodness for that, I was probably sleeping with my mouth open."

"No, you weren't. And even if you had been I would still consider you a sight for sore eyes."

She made a sort of harrumph sound and picked up the book that was lying in her lap. "I was intending just to wait for you and read a book, but I fell asleep. What time is it?"

"Almost half past one."

"Why are you so late? Surely the lecture didn't go this long? Don't tell me you were called to a case." She scrutinized his face for a moment. "You were. You're wearing your detective look."

"I'm not even going to ask what you mean by that, but yes, you're right. Crabtree came to the lecture hall and fetched me."

"A murder?"

"We don't know yet, but it was very nasty."

"If it's all right with you then, you can tell me that part in the morning. I don't want nightmares."

He bent over and touched his finger to her chin tenderly. "Nightmares? I can't imagine my brave Amy having nightmares."

"But I do. You haven't known me long enough yet."

"I shall be glad to ensure that at any time, as you know."

She smiled. "Speaking of beds, which you were about to, I had better get to my own. I believe the school inspector might pay me a visit tomorrow and I should have all my wits about me."

"Was there a particular reason you were sitting up for me?"

"There was, but it can wait." She gave him a quick kiss. "Good night. I'll see you in the morning."

In spite of his jangling alarm clock, Murdoch found it hard to wake up, and Amy had left by the time he went down to the kitchen. When he arrived at the station it was well after eight and later than he'd wanted. Gardiner was the sergeant on duty, Seymour having the luxury after a twenty-four-hour shift of a long sleep-in.

"Morning, Will. Crabtree has given me the report on last night's incident and I took the liberty of sending him and

Fyfer to start the search of the stable.”

“Thanks, John. Is there any tea brewed? I need a large cuppa before I join them.”

“I just mashed a pot half an hour ago. It’ll be good and fresh.”

The front door opened and a man entered. He was middle-aged, with a neatly trimmed beard and soberly dressed in a grey fedora and long tweed coat. Murdoch couldn’t quite place his occupation. Not a doctor, nor a minister, but with an air of calm authority about him that men in those professions often have. The man lifted his hat to Murdoch.

“Good morning, do I have the privilege of addressing Detective William Murdoch?”

“I’m Murdoch.”

The man extended his hand. “My name is Cherry, Earl Cherry, and I am actually conveying a message from Inspector Brackenreid.” He held out an envelope.

Murdoch opened it, bewildered. Brackenreid had been away from the station for the past few days, supposedly suffering from a bad cold, which had become code for a severe hangover.

Dear Murdoch. I know we have had our differences, but when it comes to the wall, you are a man whose discretion I trust. I am sending a friend of mine with this letter. I am temporarily incapacitated with the aftermath of what was probably an attack of gastritis and I am staying at a lodge to recuperate. With some time on my hands, I have need of something to read and what better opportunity than to make a thorough study of the minutes of the city council. I’ll settle for the ones for 1894. They are bound in a volume on the second shelf from the top in the bookcase by the window. As it includes the report of the chief

constable, it would be better if it were kept private. I would like you to wrap it securely and give it to Mr. Cherry, who will bring it to me. Your help in this matter is much appreciated and will not be forgotten.

Your servant, Thomas Brackenreid.

Murdoch couldn't hide his astonishment. It was impossible to imagine the inspector recovering on his sickbed with a rousing volume of the council's report. Besides which, the request to keep it private was absurd. The minutes were available to the public, who were encouraged to look at them. Cherry was watching him.

"Mr. Brackenreid speaks highly of you, Mr. Murdoch."

"Does he, indeed? He has certainly kept that a secret from me."

"Ah," replied Cherry with an understanding nod that to Murdoch looked far too professional. Now he knew what the man reminded him of. An undertaker.

"The inspector says he's at a lodge, recuperating from gastritis. Where is he?"

Cherry glanced over at Gardiner with a little shake of his head. The sergeant was rather obviously trying to pretend he wasn't listening.

"John," said Murdoch, "would you be so good as to fetch me the tea you mentioned? And perhaps one for Mr. Cherry, here."

"No, no, not for me, thank you, I just breakfasted."

With some ill grace, Gardiner headed for the duty room where the officers took their tea breaks.

"Well, Mr. Cherry. What is this all about?"

Cherry lowered his voice. "This must be kept in strictest confidence, Mr. Murdoch." He paused and Murdoch almost expected him to bring out a Bible for him to swear on.

"Yes?"

“Inspector Brackenreid is at the moment a resident at the Ollapod Club.”

It was all Murdoch could do not to burst out laughing. So the old sot had finally admitted his problem. The Ollapod Club was a nobby establishment over on Wellesley Street that claimed to cure chronic addictions to liquor. It had the reputation for being a conscience sop to wealthy clientele who stayed there for months at a time in well-tended sobriety. Rumour had it, however, that when released, a high proportion of the graduates fell back into their old ways with alarming speed.

“I see you know of us, Mr. Murdoch. You can understand therefore why the inspector wants discretion. Not everybody would see his decision to enter the club in the correct light.”

“Which is?”

“An act of courage. To acknowledge one’s weaknesses is not always easy, especially for a man with such pride and integrity as Thomas Brackenreid.”

Murdoch had never previously ascribed these qualities to his inspector. It was a novel view.

Gardiner returned with a mug of tea that Murdoch accepted gratefully, gulping down a big swallow of the hot strong brew.

“Mr. Cherry, why don’t you have a seat on the bench over there. The inspector has asked me to find a certain book for him. I’ll just be a moment.”

Brackenreid’s office was on the second floor of the station. In spite of his complaints that the division didn’t receive enough money to function as he wanted it to, the inspector had furnished his office in a luxurious fashion. There was a thick Axminster carpet on the floor and the large desk by the window was polished oak, a far cry from Murdoch’s scarred and stained pine desk, which had been dragged in from God knows where.

The room was chilly because the fire hadn’t been lit for some days, but there was a lingering smell of the rich cigars

that Brackenreid favoured. Murdoch went over to the glass-fronted bookcase. There were several fat volumes of the council's minutes, all pristine-looking. He took down the one for 1894. What was Brackenreid after? He was about to riffle through the pages but found he couldn't because they were glued together and there tucked snugly into a little nest cut into the pages was a silver flask. He pried it out and opened the top. One whiff confirmed what he suspected. The minutes of the city council for 1894 had become the inspector's private cellar. No wonder he'd made a weak excuse for wrapping the book. If he was at a facility devoted to curing inebriates, it wasn't too likely they would want him to have a flask of good whisky in his possession. What to do? Tell on him? Murdoch went over to the desk and took out a piece of paper.

Dear Inspector Brackenreid. I have great sympathy for your current struggle. Some days will be more difficult than others I'm sure, but I know you will come through it. All the best, William Murdoch.

He folded the paper and put it into the empty space. He poured the whisky into the aspidistra on the window ledge. It needed watering anyway. Then he took a sheet of one of the newspapers stacked ready to light the fire and wrapped the book. He found a ball of twine in the desk drawer and tied up the parcel, cutting the string with Brackenreid's cigar clippers.

Cherry was waiting quietly in the hall. He did not seem to have engaged Gardiner in any conversation, and the sergeant was busy writing his night report in the duty roster.

Murdoch handed Cherry the package. "Here you are, sir. And please give the inspector my condolences and wish him a speedy recovery."

"I will." He paused. "I understand Mr. Brackenreid was requesting a particular volume. Was it in good condition, would you say? What I mean is, was it suitable for reading?"

There was a look of friendly skepticism in his eyes, and suddenly Murdoch liked him much better.

"Let's say, I removed any unnecessary items so that the inspector wouldn't be distracted."

Cherry smiled. "Ah, I see. The old flask-in-the-middle trick, was it?"

Murdoch nodded.

"You'd never believe the tricks some of our pat – I mean, some of our guests can get up to when they are in still in the grip of the demon," said Cherry. "I thank you, sir. Your good inspector might not have the same gratitude now, but he will, I promise you he will."

"I hope so. How much longer will he be with you, do you think?"

"It depends on his progress. So far, he has been somewhat resistant. He did not enter the club solely of his own choice. I believe his wife was adamant."

"A week then? Two? More?"

"I'm afraid it is impossible to tell, but what I will do is to see if he can give some direction as to what he wants done at the station here. We are trying to avoid his condition becoming widely known. He seemed to think you would be able to manage without him, but you might need a more formal acknowledgement. Perhaps he could appoint you deputy inspector or something like that."

"Me? Oh I don't think so. I doubt he'd want that."

"No, I meant what I said, Mr. Murdoch. He does speak of you with admiration."

Suddenly he glanced up at the clock on the wall. "My goodness, I am late. It will be time for the morning medicine and I should be there. Good morning to you, sir. And thank you for your help."

He left and Murdoch picked up his mug. "I'm going to my office, sergeant. Tell Crabtree to come and see me when he gets back."

Hmm...if he was deputy inspector for a few weeks maybe he could sit upstairs and enjoy a nice coal fire and a couple of cigars. Perhaps he'd been too hasty in emptying the whisky flask.

CHAPTER NINE

Murdoch untied the shoelace that secured the cardboard box, removed the lid, and took out the papers, spreading them across the top of his desk. They were indeed bills, many of them months old and, by the looks of it, none yet paid. He skimmed through them, but they seemed the normal transactions for a small livery. Bills for hay, oats, bran; one from a veterinarian who'd disposed of a horse afflicted with glanders. A small sum owing to a carpenter for repair of one of the carriages. The sheets he'd taken from the spike were more recent but more demanding. The veterinarian was now threatening legal action if his bill wasn't paid within five days of receipt. On top was a handwritten piece of paper requesting the payment of three weeks' back wages in the amount of eighteen dollars. The note was signed by Elijah Green. Murdoch removed that paper and put it in his inside pocket. The other tradesmen's names he wrote down to check later.

According to Mrs. Cooke, her husband had kept four hundred dollars in his safe. That was a lot of money and would easily cover his debts. Murdoch wondered if the racing forms he'd found were a tipoff as to what that money might be earmarked for. He was about to gather up the papers and return them to the box when he saw he'd almost

overlooked a side pocket. He fished inside and took out a cloth wallet tied with ribbon. Inside was a creased piece of paper. He smoothed it out.

Purchased from Thomas Talbert, Esquire, for the sum of 200 dollars. The Livery, 27 Mutual Street. Including the six horses and three carriages and all the tack presently in use. Also the present feed as noted.

Signed. Daniel Cooke

Eleventh day of October 1863. at Toronto.

Acknowledged as stated, Thomas Talbert.

Elijah Green had referred to a man named Talbert who spelled him a couple of days of the week taking care of the stables. Were these two men related? If it was the same man, he'd be quite elderly by now.

He restored everything to the box and put it in his drawer.

There was a tap on the wall outside his cubicle, and Constable Crabtree's large shape appeared behind the reed curtain that made do as a door.

"Come in, George."

The constable shoved through the curtain that clacked noisily in his wake.

"Good morning, sir. I've come to report on the search me and Constable Fyfer did of the livery barn this morning."

"Did you find anything?"

"I'd say so."

He was carrying a lumpy-looking bundle wrapped in sacking and looked around for somewhere to put it.

"The desk is fine, George, what've you got? Not money, is it? There's quite a large sum missing, according to Mrs. Cooke."

"No, sir. No money, I'm afraid, but treasure, if I may put it that way."

Crabtree unwrapped his prize as carefully, as if it contained a glass piece. Inside was another scrap of bleached-out sacking, a length of rope, two Indian clubs, and a sheet of grubby, crumpled notepaper.

"There's a little space in the loft, not much bigger than a wardrobe, but the darkie has a cot there. There's a packing box next to it and I found these articles in there." He shook out the piece of sackcloth. "There's a stain on this one that looks like fresh blood to me."

Murdoch examined it. "It does, indeed. We'll have to get Dr. Ogden to take a look at it. Where was it exactly?"

"At the bottom of the crate. Green claims he had to bleed one of the horses, but if that's true, why take it up to the loft? Why not leave it in the barn?" Crabtree picked up one of the Indian clubs, held it in one hand, then slammed it into his open palm. "Mr. Cooke had been hit on the head. I'll wager this was the weapon used."

Murdoch focused a magnifying glass on the club. "I don't see any evidence of blood, George. Let's have a look at the other one. No, nothing on this either."

"He would have made sure to wipe them clean though, wouldn't he, sir?"

"I suppose so. What did he say about them?"

"That he used them for exercise."

"That could be true. I have a pair myself."

"It doesn't mean he didn't use one of them to bash Mr. Cooke on the head."

"True. What else have you got?"

"This rope. He would have used it to tie up Cooke before he strung him up to the rafters. It was coiled in the bottom of the crate under a piece of newspaper. Green said he used it as a lead for the horses, but if that's the case, why not keep it in the tack room with the other equipment?"

"Good point, George."

Murdoch examined the rope, which was about an inch in diameter and knotted at each end. He thought that was

odd, but he couldn't find any sign of blood along its entire length, or traces of horsehair for that matter, which he thought was also odd. He decided for the moment to keep these doubts to himself. George didn't need any further convincing that they had their culprit.

"What's the paper all about?"

"Ah, yes, sir. That's the clincher, as far as I'm concerned. Have a look at what's written on it. Green was just in front of me and he actually snatched this out of my hand. Said it was private property and nothing to do with the murder. He was about to tear it up, but I got to it first. He was quite surly, so of course that got my dander up immediately. I told him what for and snaffled it, but for a minute I truly thought he'd be willing to fight me for it."

Murdoch picked up the piece of notepaper. Somebody, he presumed Green, had printed in a bold clear hand: *The Master. Advance Retreat Bar Bottom Chop Hit Mark Fall.*

The words were in a column on the left side of the page. The rest of the sheet was blank.

"It doesn't make much sense to me, George, does it you?"

"I think it's a plan of attack. See, it starts with the Master, which I assume is his employer, Mr. Cooke. Then it's *hit, mark, fall*. Mr. Cooke was marked all right."

"What about the other words?"

"He was probably planning how to do it."

"Did he have an explanation?"

"No, he did not. He admitted it was his and his hand, but he kept saying it had nothing to do with Cooke's death and it was private. Like I said, he was highly disturbed. Most I've seen from him yet."

Murdoch folded the paper again.

"Why would Green commit such a vicious act? What's his motivation?"

"I can't say, sir. Maybe he got it into his head that Mr. Cooke had slighted him somehow and he wanted his

revenge.”

“That’s possible. I don’t know about slighting him, but Cooke did owe him for three weeks’ wages.”

“There you go then.” Crabtree had an expectant look on his face, and Murdoch had the impression the constable was disappointed with his lack of enthusiasm for his findings. “Are you going to arrest him?”

“Not immediately, George. We don’t have quite enough to go on. But that was good work. I’ll follow it up.”

Crabtree fished in his pocket and took out some sheets of paper. “Constable Fyfer wanted me to pass this along to you, sir. He’s relieving Burley at the livery. When we arrived the cabbies were waiting because they hadn’t heard what had happened. Fyfer decided to question them and save you the trouble. He wrote out everything for you.”

“Did he indeed? He’s a diligent fellow, I must say. In the meantime, George, I’d like you to start doing the usual rounds. Check out all the houses up and down the street. Find out if anybody saw the coloured man who came to the Cooke house and apparently so upset Daniel Cooke. Here, I’ve written out the names and addresses of all the tradesmen that Cooke owed money to. Talk to them as well.”

“Yes, sir.”

“I’ll look over what Fyfer has written, then I’m going to have a chat with Green’s helper, Mr. Talbert.”

Crabtree left. Murdoch pushed the little treasure trove to one side, took out his pipe and tobacco, lit up, and unfolded Fyfer’s report.

CHAPTER TEN

THURSDAY, APRIL 16, 1896

Report of Constable Second Class Frank Fyfer.

Mr. Daniel Cooke, deceased, employed six cab drivers. Four of them were present when constable first class George Crabtree and I arrived at the livery stable, 76 Mutual Street, city of Toronto. They were Robert Littlejohn, Joseph Wallace, Albert Carney, and Robert Robson; Thomas Muckle is down with pneumonia and has not been working for a month; Paul Musgrave was expected in later this morning. I interviewed each man separately, but as I was asking the same question of each I thought it would be simpler and add clarification if I listed first the question then the answer each man made. The comparisons might prove fruitful. I have written down in their own words what they said.

"Get on with it, Frank," Murdoch muttered out loud and drew in another puff of tobacco.

1. When did you last see Mr. Cooke?

Robert Littlejohn: When I returned the carriage at three o'clock yesterday.

Joseph Wallace: Twice. First when I took out the carriage at eleven o'clock and second when I brought it back at one o'clock. The bloody horse had cast a shoe, so I didn't get much business. I considered going out on another shift, but it's hardly worth it when we have to be all done by eight o'clock on Wednesdays.

Albert Carney: I saw him when I took out Mercer at nine o'clock and again when I brought her back at two o'clock.

Robert Robson: I checked out at ten minutes past three and he signed the sheet. When I returned at seven o'clock he was not present to initial my sign-off but that was not so unusual so I left not thinking anything of it. Wednesday is an early closing day.

2. How did he seem?

Littlejohn: I didn't notice. Businesslike, I suppose. He said I owed him money, which I didn't, but we cleared it up.

Wallace: He seemed like usual. We didn't say much. I'm not one for chatting with the boss like some are. I signed in and he initialled. He might have asked me if I'd had a good run, but I don't really remember. He was only fishing anyways. Always worried in case we're cheating him and not reporting the fares.

(Note from F.F.: Joseph Wallace showed himself to be a chronic complainer with a sour attitude toward life.)

Carney: I can't say as I noticed anything different. He's not the cheeriest of fellows, God forgive me for speaking ill of the dead, but it is the truth.

Robson: He wasn't no different from usual.

3. Do you know if Mr. Cooke had any disagreements with anybody that might have led to his death?

Littlejohn: I don't know. I just do my job. I've only worked here three months.

Wallace: If anybody had disagreements with Mr. Cooke, I'd say it was his tradesmen. He never paid his bills on time. He couldn't do that to us because we pay him our commission on fares and we pay for rental, but he was on top of every nickel. Get a tear in the upholstery and he'd expect you to pay for the repair. On the other hand, you never know what's going on in people's minds, do you? It might be a good idea to have a chin with Paul Musgrave. I'm not accusing him, mind, but I doubt he's grieving too much at the boss's demise, given the wife is now available.

(Note from F.F.: Here Wallace actually gave me a sly wink. I did, of course, ask him what he was referring to, but he clammed up completely. Said he meant nothing by it. Musgrave is a bachelor, that's all, and aren't all bachelors in need of wives? He refused to say any more and said to ask the man in question who as I said wasn't present.)

Carney: Well, he had tradesmen coming to the door two or three times a week for the past month. They was all pretty hot under the collars cos they said as they hadn't been paid. God forgive me for speaking ill of the dead.

(Note from F.F.: I thought it necessary to ask him at this point if he knew the names of the tradesmen and he said there were two he knew: Walter Hammill, the feed merchant, and Timothy Mishaw, a carpenter.)

Robson. He had a barney with his wife a few days ago, if that's what you mean. I saw them in the office. Real fierce it was, but she's not a woman I'd like to cross. I felt more sorry for him than her.

(Note from F.F.: I pressed Robson on this matter as to what the quarrel was all about, but he couldn't enlighten me. Said he didn't hear anything because they were in the office, but he could see them. He

does also admit to being a little deaf. When I pinned him down as to the exact time of this supposed row, he said it occurred Friday last, April 10, when he returned in the evening at nine o'clock. No one else was in the barn except the stable hand, Green.)

4. Would you say that you yourself got along with Mr. Cooke?

Littlejohn: He was my boss, I didn't need to like him. I can work anywhere. His cut isn't no different from the others. One dollar per shift for the carriage and 5 per cent commission on fares.

Wallace: Why are you asking me? Don't think you can throw suspicion on me, young man. I had no quarrel with Daniel Cooke, and you can't twist my words to make it seem that way.

(Note from F.F.: It took a while to calm Mr. Wallace's fears.)

Carney: I get along with everybody, ask my wife.

Robson: We got along all right. He's not a man I'd invite over for dinner, mind you.

5. We know that Mr. Cooke died somewhere between eight o'clock and nine o'clock. Can you give me an account of your whereabouts at that time and the names of a person or persons who will verify that.

Littlejohn: I don't know where I was. I went for a walk on Queen Street, nowhere near the stables. I got home about ten o'clock.

(Note from F.F.: This was a most unsatisfactory answer, and the man was obviously uncomfortable. I threatened to charge him with obstructing justice if he didn't tell the truth, and after much beating about the bush, he admitted he had been visiting a house of ill repute on Queen Street. I did get the address from him and the name of the woman he was visiting. This can easily be verified if she is willing to testify, which may not be the case. Mr. Littlejohn lives at home with

his elderly mother and was distraught at the thought of her knowing what he was up to.)

Wallace: I can't believe you're asking me all these questions. Much more and I will hire a solicitor. I was at home all evening sitting in front of my own hearth, minding my own business. My wife can vouch for that and so can my brother and sister-in-law, who live with us.

Carney: I was at the Mechanics Institute with my wife. We were listening to a visiting preacher from America. Very good he was too. Most uplifting.

Robson: I know what you're getting at. I was one of the last to leave the stables along with Musgrave, but I went straight home. My wife was waiting for me and so were my two sons and three daughters. They are all old enough to know and tell the truth, and we are all good Christians.

(Note from F.F.: As Mr. Robson was indeed the last one to sign out except for Mr. Musgrave, I asked him if he had noticed any strangers in the area who might be considered suspicious.)

Robson: No. Didn't see anybody. It was raining when I turned in, and I just tucked my head in and went straight home. I've just got shut of a cold and I didn't want to get pneumonia like Muckle.

(Note from F.F.: Given the peculiar character of the assault on Mr. Cooke and what Constable Crabtree discovered in his box, I thought it might be prudent to ask the men specifically about the stable hand, Elijah Green.)

6. How did Mr. Cooke get along with Elijah Green?

Littlejohn: How should I know? Elijah did a good job, but you don't really see him much.

Wallace: Another ridiculous question. I never saw them together. All I know is that I've been here for

going on ten years and Green was here when I came so he must be doing all right.

Carney: I don't know the answer to that. Why? Are you saying the darkie killed him?

Robson: Elijah is a fine fellow, as far as I'm concerned. He takes good care of the horses. Cooke was lucky to have him.

7. Do any of you have a key to the stables or the office?

All answered no.

(Note from F.F.: My assessment after interviewing these men is that Daniel Cooke was not particularly liked but neither was he hated. I think it is well worth our while to follow up on the reported quarrel between Mr. Cooke and his wife and also the tradesmen who wanted their money. Deprivation can make men desperate, as we know. In terms of alibis for the time of death, I can pursue that, but my feeling was that these men were telling the truth. I will also interview Paul Musgrave if you want me to.)

End of report.

Signed , Francis Fyfer.

Murdoch put down the paper. The first line of suspects in a murder case was always the victim's immediate circle, which in this case meant his employees. The cabbies would have been familiar with Cooke's schedule and with the stable itself, which he thought was an important factor in the case unless the killer was blessed with extraordinary good luck not to be interrupted. Fyfer had saved him time by questioning the men, but Murdoch would have liked to be present. He'd learned to trust his own instincts about the unspoken revelations that people made during questioning. When he'd shared this with Amy one night, she said he was probably "air scenting" like a hound does. "As long as my

nose doesn't twitch," was his retort, but he thought there was truth in what she said. He couldn't pick up the trail from a written report, however thorough it was. He supposed he should trust Fyfer's instincts too, but he almost wished the fellow wasn't quite so eager. He was right, though. Adelaide Cooke had said she hadn't stepped into the livery since Christmas, which obviously wasn't the case if Mr. Robson was to be believed. He wondered what Wallace's "sly wink" meant. Did it imply something between the ungrieving widow and the cabbie Musgrave? Given the amount of debt Cooke had incurred, Murdoch could understand irate tradesman being driven to some act of desperation. He put Fyfer's report in the drawer and extinguished his pipe.

He frowned. He seemed to have a veritable shoal of suspects.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Murdoch had been sitting in Humphrey's embalming room for at least half an hour. Daniel Cooke was lying on his back on the gurney in the centre of the room. His skin was fishbelly grey and he was already beginning to smell. The only sound that disturbed the thick silence of death was the buzzing of two or three elusive flies. They were hovering around the corpse and had so far managed to evade Murdoch's attempts to get rid of them. The door swung open and Professor Broske and Dr. Ogden bustled in.

"I do apologize for keeping you waiting, Mr. Murdoch," said Dr. Ogden. "Professor Broske was showing me some utterly fascinating photographs he took recently of a young patient who had broken his elbow. It fixed in place, alas, and had to be straightened. The doctor used his camera to record the young boy's expressions throughout the entire procedure. Quite amazing."

"That must have been painful for the boy," said Murdoch.

"Dreadfully so," answered Broske. "He was a brave young lad, but his face revealed everything. It was extremely distressing to witness."

Not to mention experience, thought Murdoch.

Broske slipped on one of the holland aprons hanging on hooks by the door. Dr. Ogden did likewise.

"Miss Julia has invited me to do the examination," he said. "I am so happy to be given this opportunity."

Why the man had taken to calling her that, Murdoch didn't know, but she seemed to like it and smiled prettily.

"I will be writing down the notes," she said.

"Before we start, Dr. Ogden, I have a request. One of my constables found some objects in the stable that I'd like to have examined more closely. They're over on the shelf wrapped in newspaper. I also found what is very likely the horsewhip that was used on Cooke. I've put that there also."

"I'll look at them afterwards. Professor Broske can corroborate my findings for me."

"Delighted to."

That little preamble taken care of, the professor got to work. The first part of the post-mortem he conducted in the conventional way, leaving the corpse clothed and simply dictating notes as to what he observed as he walked around the gurney.

"Daniel Cooke was well nourished, almost too much so. His height is five feet, ten and one-quarter inches. At time of death, he was dressed in a pair of plaid trousers, brown socks, and boots, no shirt or undergarment. All garments are of good quality. Mr. Murdoch, I will leave it to you to write out the report concerning his other apparel."

While he was waiting for them to arrive, Murdoch had done just that. Nothing new had been revealed.

Broske called over to him, "Mr. Murdoch? Help me turn him over, will you?"

Together they rolled over the body. "We have already remarked on the nature of the wounds to his back, but perhaps you could note down our observations now, Miss Julia? He has been struck many times. I will endeavour to make a more precise count, but as they overlap we might not be able to be completely exact. The marks appear to be

slightly deeper on his left side and more concentrated on the lower end of the torso." Broske smiled at Murdoch. "What would you say that indicates?"

"His assailant was short. Or certainly shorter than Mr. Cooke. Even allowing for the fact that he had been hoisted up, the strikes of the whip didn't reach up any farther than his shoulder blades. And the assailant was right-handed."

"Very good, very good. I agree with that, don't you, Miss Julia?"

"I do."

Together they examined Cooke's back, disputing in a friendly way whether that stripe or this was an overlay or not. Finally, Broske straightened up.

"I would say he was struck between thirty-seven and thirty-nine times, but some of the blows were done after death."

"And I agree with that assessment," added Dr. Ogden. "The lashes as they cross here and here have broken the skin, which to me indicates that the perpetrator was becoming more ferocious as he continued."

The professor nodded. "That happens. When I was serving in the army, I saw men completely lose their tempers over the most trivial incident, but once they had embarked, the rage seemed to overtake them and they would have killed if not separated. Dogs are the same."

He began to undo Cooke's trouser buttons. "If you'll remove the boots, Murdoch, it will be easier to take off his trolleywags, if I may use such an expression."

They worked together while Dr. Ogden watched. Underneath his trousers, Cooke was wearing flannel underwear, which Broske pulled off.

"Ah look at that." He poked at the flaccid penis. "I'd say the man had at least one bout with venereal disease, wouldn't you, Miss Julia?"

She leaned forward to take a look, and Broske cradled Cooke's member in his hand.

“Yes, indeed. That’s quite a scar. A large chancre.”

“He must have contracted it some time ago, it’s not recent. So far, I don’t see any other signs of syphilis, but we’ll see more when we open up his brain. Mr. Murdoch, will you be so good as to wheel over the instrument trolley. I’ll need the scalpel first.”

He proceeded to make an incision across the top of Cooke’s head from ear to ear. He pulled back the scalp.

“Pass me the saw, if you please, Mr. Murdoch.”

Murdoch thought he would rather prefer to take notes than be the assistant, but it was too late now. Broske sawed through the skull, removed the dome, put it in a dish, severed the nerves, then lifted out the brain, which was the size of his fist.

“Ah good, the brain looks normal, fortunately for his wife. There is no current disease that I can see.”

He held it in his hand for a moment, then lifted it to the light. “Often in contemplating the brain of one of my patients, when it was visible to me, I have pondered over its structure and functions and seeing the blood coursing through it, I have imagined that I might penetrate into the inner life of the brain cells. I have thought I might learn the laws of organic change, the order, the harmony, the most perfect concatenations, but I must admit, I never yet saw anything, not the faintest gleam that gave me hope of penetrating to the source of thought.”

He spoke with such yearning and reverence that Murdoch was astonished. As for Dr. Ogden, she was staring at Broske trans-fixed.

She spoke softly. “I myself have had such similar feelings. We know so little, do we not? I often think it is as if we are at the very base of the mountain that towers above us in all its grandeur and in our lifetime we can expect to climb only a few feet, hoping that the next generation will go on toward the top.”

There was silence while Broske laid Cooke's brain in the dish. Murdoch didn't utter his own thoughts, but he didn't have to. There was an unspoken sympathy among the three of them.

Broske returned to his job. He was meticulous and thorough and moved quickly. He opened up the front of Cooke's chest and removed his heart.

"My, my, look at that. There is an equal amount of blood in each cavity. I would say that Mr. Cooke died from shock brought about by an intense emotion." He glanced over at Murdoch and Dr. Ogden. "I have it on the best authority that the human heart is capable of breaking in twain if confronted by grief. A certain captain came home to port expecting to be greeted by 'is beloved wife and children only to be informed that all of them had perished in a fire. He dropped to the ground dead, and when the post-mortem examination was conducted it was discovered his heart had literally burst."

"Do you think sorrow killed Mr. Cooke?" asked Dr. Ogden.

"Not necessarily. Any of the most powerful emotions can cause such a shock, even joy. But given the lividity in his face when we found him, I would say it more likely that he died from sheer terror. He struggled against his fate. In another man, whatever emotion he went through might not have killed him, but you can observe here that the pulmonary artery is thickened."

Dr. Ogden leaned forward. "And see the roughness of his liver. I'd say that was early stages of cirrhosis."

"Quite so. Well, let us continue. I'll take that knife, please, Mr. Murdoch."

Murdoch handed him a long knife from the tray. Broske plunged it underneath Cooke's jaw and thrust upward, then he drew two lines away from the incision on either side. The whole of the lower jaw dropped, revealing the knife sticking up in the mouth.

“Would you be so good as to grasp hold of the tongue, Mr. Murdoch, and pull it forward so I can get to the pharynx.”

Murdoch thought it was possibly the most unpleasant thing he had ever been asked to do, but his pride was involved now and he wasn't about to back away. He grasped the muscular cold piece of meat that had once served Daniel Cooke to utter words of many hues and tugged it out of the way until the professor had removed the pharynx, larynx, and the upper esophagus and examined them.

“No blockage anywhere. No bruising on the carotid arteries. He wasn't strangled or suffocated. He did vomit, but it did not get swallowed so his air passages are clear. Oh dear, Mr. Murdoch, you've stained your cuff.”

“I'll replace it later.”

“We're nearing the end. Let's take out the bladder and the urethra. They have emptied, which is quite normal with sudden death. I'll do the stomach next, Miss Julia. A ligature, if you please.”

She handed him a long piece of twine, and he tied off the upper end of the stomach, then knotted two other pieces at the other end. He cut the stomach away and laid it on the tray.

“We'll put the contents in one of those glass jars, please, Mr. Murdoch. They'll have to be examined more closely later on.”

Murdoch gave him the jar, and he emptied the contents of the stomach into it, squeezing the organ as if it were a bagpipe.

“He certainly didn't have time to digest his supper before he died.”

That fit in with what Mrs. Cooke had told Murdoch about Cooke being called from the dinner table before he'd finished eating.

“Now we'll do the same with the intestines, and, Miss Julia, I'd be grateful if you would take care of labelling the

jars.”

“I will indeed.”

Broske stepped away from the gurney and surveyed his handiwork. “I don’t know if I speak for you, Miss Julia, but no matter how many dissections I have performed, I never fail to be in awe of the wondrous workings and mechanics of the human body.”

She beamed. “You do indeed speak for me, doctor.”

Murdoch surveyed the bloody carcass. Broske had a point, but all Murdoch could see was a body that has been cut into pieces and whose various organs were distributed like meat in a market. Then to his surprise, the doctor said, “Poor fellow. I don’t know what his life was like or his character, but it is hard not to feel a twinge of pity for him.” He crossed himself. “May God have mercy on his soul.”

“Amen,” said Murdoch, and he crossed himself likewise.

Dr. Ogden nodded.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Murdoch was glad of the opportunity to clear his nostrils of the stink of death, and he bicycled slower than usual over to Shuter Street, where Thomas Talbert lived. The warm spring sun seemed to have drawn out half the city's population, and Yonge Street was crowded with passersby. Women with enormous hats decorated with enough flowers to fill his front yard strolled arm in arm down the street, studiously ignoring the loud pleas from the shopkeepers standing outside their stores to "come in and look around, no obligation." A flock of four or five boys, playing truant from school, raced alongside him in the gutter, pretending they were horses and agilely avoiding the droppings of the real creatures.

"Why aren't you in school?" he called out, and they scattered into the crowd. He turned onto Wilton Street, less busy, but still humming. Two elderly priests in their saucer hats, countrymen for certain, dark crows amid colourful birds of paradise, threaded their way nervously in and out of the throngs of women. As he went by, Murdoch called out, "Bless me, fathers." And they both hastily made the sign of the cross in his direction. He grinned. This life may be transitory, but it was preferable to the irrevocable stillness of death that he had just been so close to.

Mutual and Shuter Streets were a physician's enclave with brass plates on almost every second gate. The houses were large and elegant with generous private grounds, all impeccably maintained by fleets of gardeners. Number thirty-three Shuter was a tall, narrow house that looked squeezed in as an afterthought between the two wider houses on either side. However, it, too, looked well cared for. There were bushes in the front yard, already in bud, and the flowerbed that edged the path was thick with yellow and purple crocus and scattered with snowdrops. The grass, albeit still anemic, was freshly raked, cleared of all the sodden leaves of autumn. Murdoch wondered how Mr. Talbert, a stable hand, could afford to live in such a nobby neighbourhood. He knocked on the door. The shiny brass knocker was in the shape of a horse's hoof.

He didn't have to wait long. The door was opened by a plump, pink-cheeked woman wearing the dark formal gown and white starched apron of a housekeeper. Murdoch tipped his hat.

"Good morning, ma'am. I wonder if I might have a word with Mr. Talbert?"

"He doesn't usually see visitors in the morning. He does his correspondence." Her voice was pleasant.

He took out his calling card and handed it to her. "I'm Detective William Murdoch from number four station. I'm afraid it's a matter of some urgency."

"Oh dearie me, is it about Mr. Cooke? We heard there was a terrible incident in the livery."

Murdoch wondered how much had already been distorted by rumour. "Yes, ma'am. I am here concerning Mr. Cooke."

"You'd better come in. I'll see if Mr. Talbot is available."

Murdoch stepped into the narrow foyer while she scurried away, disappearing through a curtained archway at the end of the hall. Sunlight was streaming through a beautiful stained-glass window above the door lintel, but

there were no dust motes to catch the light in this foyer. There was a pleasant smell of beeswax, and the wooden floor gleamed with polish as did the simple coat stand and small table beside it. Murdoch was about to have a look at the framed pictures hanging on the wall when the housekeeper emerged.

"He said he'll see you but for no more than an hour." She smiled apologetically. "I'm afraid he can be rather determined about his timetable no matter who it is. Let me take your hat. Come this way, if you please."

For a stout, middle-aged woman, she moved quickly and lightly. She pulled back the green flowered portière at the end of the hall and opened the door to usher him in.

"Detective Murdoch, Mr. Talbert."

She bustled off immediately, leaving Murdoch on the threshold.

An elderly man with long white hair was seated by the fire, which had been built up to a roaring blaze, making the room stiflingly hot. He turned around at Murdoch's entrance.

"You wanted to see me?" His voice was flat and unwelcoming, his expression suspicious and unfriendly.

Murdoch could barely hide his surprise. Talbert was a negro.

"You are Thomas Talbert, are you not? You work at the livery owned by Mr. Daniel Cooke?"

"Yes, I do."

"I understand from your housekeeper, sir, that you already know about the death of your employer."

Talbert stared at him for a moment, then he got out of his chair and walked over to the tea trolley that was nearby. He was a tall, wide-shouldered man, thin and straight-backed, who even at his advanced age emanated strength and authority. However, Murdoch wondered if he had even heard what he'd said or comprehended it.

"Mr. Talbert?"

"I do know. Elijah Green came and told me last night. He said Cooke had been whipped." Talbert started to pour himself a cup of tea, his back toward Murdoch.

"The assault brought on a heart seizure, so it has become a case of manslaughter. Which is why I am here."

"What do you want from me?" Talbert returned to his chair with his teacup in his hand. "Don't tell me you've got me in your sights? Why is that, mister? Is it because I'm a nigger man? I'm a bit too old to be going around *assaulting* men, wouldn't you think?"

His tone of voice was conversational, but a sharp edge was close beneath the surface and he'd got under Murdoch's skin.

"I haven't got you in my sights, as you put it. And, frankly, I had no idea you were a negro until I came into this room."

For some reason that amused Talbert and he laughed out loud. "I could see that. It was written all over your face. For a frog, begging your pardon for the expression, you reveal too much. Just because I live on the same street as a dozen rich sawbones and my house is well kept and I have a nice plump pink housekeeper, you thought I was white. Must have been a shock when you found yourself staring at an old darkie."

"A surprise, more like."

Talbert waved in the direction of one of the chairs. "Why don't you pull over that chair and sit down. And I suppose you'll be wanting some tea?"

"Thank you, I'd like that."

Talbert put his cup on the floor beside him. With a little grunt, he pushed himself to his feet and went over to an ornately embroidered bell pull beside the mantelpiece and gave it a hard tug.

Murdoch had never been in the house of a negro before, and he glanced around as discretely as he could. The room was well furnished and it looked like many others he'd been

in. Not quite as jammed with furniture as some, but the pieces were of good quality, and like the foyer, any wood that was visible gleamed from beeswax. Over the mantel, there was a large oil painting of Jesus ascending to heaven, next to it, a large gold cross – without the crucified Christ that Murdoch was used to.

The housekeeper appeared immediately. “Yes, Mr. Talbert?”

“Bring another cup for the detective, will you, Mrs. Stokely? And if there’s any of your caraway-seed cake left, bring that too.”

She gave a little bob and hurried off. Talbert resumed his seat in the Windsor chair. He picked Murdoch’s calling card off the lap desk where he’d tucked it.

“So, Mr., er, Murdoch, just why have you come to talk to me?”

For some reason Murdoch couldn’t quite fathom, Talbert’s mood had altered and his tone was more friendly. He hadn’t yet expressed a single word of regret at Cooke’s death.

“Because I spoke to Elijah Green, who said you spell him off at the stables a couple of days a week. I understand you usually go in on Wednesdays.”

“I do, but I had a bout with my lumbago yesterday and begged off. Good thing I did, in the circumstances. I’m sure it wasn’t pleasant for Elijah to find the man strung up like that, but better him than me. He’s young.”

“Are you feeling better?” Murdoch asked politely. Talbert had been moving stiffly, but no worse than a man of his age.

“Yes, it’s almost gone. Thank you.”

“As I understand it, you used to own the stables. Or do I have that wrong?”

“Who told you that?”

“Nobody told me. I found a bill of sale in Mr. Cooke’s safe. I’m just making sure you’re the same Talbert who was

named as the original proprietor.”

“Yes, that’s me. That was a long time ago.” He paused, then sipped some more tea. “Robbed, was he?”

“Why do you say that?”

Talbert chuckled. “Easy to work that out. You said you’d been looking in his safe. Probably Adelaide Cooke made you check, didn’t she?”

Murdoch shrugged. He’d never felt so much on the defensive during an interrogation.

“The first thing on that woman’s mind would be money,” Talbert continued. “She’d say he was robbed even if he weren’t. Dan was a fool about his money. He liked to see it mount up so he could gloat over it, but I doubt he let his missus know everything he had.”

There was a quick tap on the door and Mr. Stokely entered carrying a dainty china cup and saucer. She went to the trolley.

“Shall I pour, sir?”

“Yes, please. I hope you like your tea robust, Mr. Murdoch, because that’s what it is.”

“I do.”

Mr. Stokely smiled. “Sugar?”

“Two lumps and some milk will do fine, thank you, ma’am.”

“There was no more cake, Mr. Talbert.”

“Mr. Murdoch’s loss.”

The housekeeper was addressing her employer formally, but there was an easiness between them that seemed to Murdoch to come from more than long service. Or was he misreading the comfortable sense of warmth between them?

Another quick bob and she left. Talbert waited until Murdoch had sipped his tea.

“Strong enough for you?”

“Indeed.”

Talbert helped himself to more tea. “Daniel kept a revolver in the drawer. Did you find it?”

"No we haven't as yet."

Talbert leaned back against his chair, his long, wavy hair showed startlingly white against the red brocade.

"You're probably expecting me to express some sorrow for the poor deceased, some indignation about what has befallen him."

"People react differently. Maybe you're a man who doesn't show his feelings."

Talbert guffawed. "But I'm a darkie. Don't you know all us coloured folks are emotional to the point of excess? We can't help ourselves, so I've heard."

"I have no comment about that, Mr. Talbert."

"Good. The truth is that Cooke and I didn't move in the same circles. I hardly saw the man."

It wasn't quite what he'd conveyed earlier, but Murdoch let that ride.

"We know that Mr. Cooke died sometime between eight o'clock and half past nine last night. Do you mind telling me where you were you at that time, Mr. Talbert?"

"I was right here. Same chair, same room. I never go out at night."

"Is there anybody who can vouch for you?"

"Mrs. Stokely will. She has a room upstairs, but she always keeps me company in the evening. But you can't ask her now, I heard her go out. It's market day."

"I'll have to come back and talk to her."

"Suit yourself, but she won't say anything different."

"Why? Because you'll tell her not to?"

"No, because it's the truth."

Talbert was probably old enough to be Murdoch's grandfather, but there was nothing frail about him. From the beginning he had taken charge of the situation and kept Murdoch off balance.

"Did Mr. Cooke have any enemies that you know of, Mr. Talbert?"

"He was a boss and he was well off. That'll get you enemies every time. There's always men who like to grub around in their own jealousy and malice." Talbert dabbed at his mouth with a napkin. "He was also a man who enjoyed a little flutter now and again so he knew a few touts. He wasn't always quick to pay his debts, perhaps one of them lost patience."

Murdoch put his cup and saucer on the trolley and took out his notebook. "Do you know the names of these men?"

"No, not a one. I'm not a gambler myself. I don't like to squander my hard-earned money."

"Would anybody else know who these men were?"

"That's for you to find out, isn't it? I only go to the livery twice a week. I didn't hob and nob with the others, nor they with me."

"Did Elijah Green and Cooke get along?"

"'Course they did. Why shouldn't they? Elijah took damn good care of those horses, and Dan got away with paying him a pittance because he's a coloured man."

"What about the other cabbies? What's your opinion of them?"

"I don't have any one way or the other. We don't mix."

"Mr. Wallace implied there might be something a little untoward going on between Mrs. Cooke and Mr. Musgrave."

Talbert laughed. "That's hard to believe. She's not the most attractive specimen of the fair sex I've ever known. But there's no accounting for taste, is there? And now I suppose she will inherit a nice sum of money. That can surely turn a pig's ear into a silk purse, can't it? You should investigate those two, Mr. Murdoch. Dan's death sounds suspiciously convenient to me and Musgrave's a man I wouldn't trust as far as I could throw him, which isn't far these days. He has a keen nose for which side his bread is buttered."

Murdoch put away his notebook.

"That's it, then? You're done?"

“For the moment. But there is one thing I could ask you...you sold your livery to Mr. Cooke for a paltry two hundred dollars. Why was that?”

This clearly wasn't a question Talbert was expecting and he paused for a moment.

“I'd had a run of bad luck, horses getting ill, a fire in the tack room. He bailed me out. At the time I was grateful for whatever I could get.”

“It must have been difficult to go from being the boss to being an employee.”

The old man's face revealed nothing. “I didn't work for him right away. I did other things. I've only been going into the stable the last couple of years. Elijah asked me and I accepted to help him out.” He raised his head and glanced over at the clock on the mantelpiece. “That's all the time I can spare you, detective. I have more letters to write. Your hour is up.” He picked up his lap desk and began to shuffle through sheets of paper.

Murdoch stood up. “Thank you for your co-operation, sir.”

Talbert waved his hand at the door. “Let yourself out, will you?”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

JUNE 1859

She didn't know how long she'd been strung up, the rope hoisted tight over the beam hook until her toes barely brushed the ground. The muscles in her arms were screaming with the pain, and her wrists burned as if they were dipped in lye where the rope bit into her skin. She moaned. She had vowed she wouldn't cry out or beg for mercy, but that was at the beginning. Now she would have blubbered and wept without control even to the woman she hated with a bitterness that paradoxically kept her alive. Her father had always said, "My daughter's a good hater. Don't seem that way, she's so sweet and buttery to strangers, but I know her. She takes after me, she don't ever forgive when she thinks there's a wrong." Her mother, ever the soother, had protested, but Lena had experienced an odd sort of pride. To hate made her strong, made her not give in, made her endure the cruelty that was more and more frequently visited upon her now that Mrs. Dickie was so ill and not at home any more.

The row this time had been because Caddie's tartan gown wasn't ready for her to wear to church. The night had been too wet for any washing to dry properly, and there was nothing Lena could do about it.

"You're a lazy slut. I don't know why I keep you. You are one ugly nigger." This was accompanied by hard slaps to the head. It was only because Leigh had come into the room at that moment that Caddie had stopped, but he couldn't, or wouldn't, protect her completely. All three of them knew the never-acknowledged cause of his wife's jealousy. Just before they left for church, Caddie had ordered Sam, their lone field hand, to string Lena up to teach her a lesson and to think about what a wicked, sly girl she was. She may or may not have her whipped when she returned.

The door to the shed opened, but she couldn't see who came in and her body tensed with fear.

"It's me. I've brought you some milk."

"Fidelia, bless you, bless you."

"First off, I'm gonna get you on this stool."

The girl caught hold of Lena's legs and heaved her up, holding her with one arm while she thrust a milking stool underneath her feet. Some of the weight was taken off Lena's arms and she cried out with the relief of it.

Fidelia dipped a ladle into her pail of milk and lifted it to Lena's lips. She drank thirstily.

"More?"

"No, I'm afraid I'll be sick."

"D'you want me cut you down?"

"You'll get into worse trouble."

"I don't care. T'aint right what she's doing to you."

Lena was weeping now, she couldn't help it. "My arms are in agony, Fiddie. I think I'd prefer a whipping to this."

"Tell you what, I'm gonna climb on the stool and you can sit on my shoulders. That'll take you up higher even."

"Don't be silly. I'm far too heavy."

"No you ain't. 'Sides I worked in the fields since I was seven, before Mrs. Dickie bought me. I'm strong as a mule."

"Fiddie..."

"We can do it for bits at a time till they come back. You'll see."

Fidelia suited her action to the words and was able to stand on the stool, crouch down, and get her shoulders under Lena's legs. With much initial wobbling, she straightened up, and Lena was lifted almost as high as the rafter so that she could bend her arms. Lena breathed her thanks, trying hard not to cry out with the sweetness of the relief.

"You know my father used to lift me on his shoulders when I was a child. I thought I was queen of the world then, up so high, I could touch the tree branches and pick off some of the best of the apples."

Fidelia grunted. "I don't have a rememory of my pappy. Nor my mammy, if you was to ask. There's always been just me."

"But now you have me. That's better, isn't it, Fiddie?"

"'Course it is. Like it's better to have roast chicken off the spit than acorn soup. Like it's better to have fresh blackberries off the bush than dried raisins with weevils in them. Like it's better to have -"

Lena managed to dredge up a chuckle. "Don't go on, please."

They stayed silently in that strange position, the young, skinny girl holding the bigger, heavier one on her shoulders, her hands around Lena's legs.

"I heard Missus Caddie say that Missus Dickie won't be coming home no more. She's got the white sickness and she ain't never gonna get better."

"I know."

"Does that mean we'll belong to Mr. Leigh and Missus Caddie?"

Lena whispered, "God help us, Fiddie, but it will mean that."

"We should run away."

"You know I can't now. But you should. Fiddie, you should get out of here as fast and as far as you can."

Fidelia eased her burden as best she could. "I ain't going nowhere without you. You know that."

Leigh Dickie and his wife didn't return from church for another hour and a half. The two in the barn heard them coming and Fidelia had to get Lena off her aching shoulders. Then, after waiting as long as she dared, she removed the stool and Lena was once again hanging by her wrists. She felt the child in her belly shift in protest.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Somebody had put two large clay pots of early daffodils beside the station door. Murdoch leaned his wheel against the wall and went inside.

"You're looking a bit knackered, Will," said Charlie Seymour, who was sitting at the duty desk. To Murdoch's ears, the sergeant's voice was tinged with reproach. Murdoch suspected he disapproved of the relationship between he and Amy Slade. It's not me who won't make it legal, he thought.

"I am. I didn't get home until the early hours of the morning," answered Murdoch, trying not to sound defensive. "You know about the case, don't you?"

"I do. Crabtree and Fyfer filled me in. It's a strange one. Any suspects?"

Murdoch shrugged. "You know how it is at this stage. Could be anybody. There are several unpaid tradesmen who might have lost their patience. Talbert, one of the stable hands, said Cooke ran with a fast crowd and liked to gamble. Talbert's an old man, but he could be carrying a grudge from years ago when, I believe, Cooke cheated him over the purchase of his livery. Mrs. Cooke says her husband was robbed. One of the cabbies says another cabbie, Musgrave, was interested in Mrs. Cooke and implied he

might have disposed of Mrs. Cooke for that reason. Another man claims to have witnessed a right barney between Mrs. Cooke and her husband a few days ago. Then Crabtree found a piece of blood-stained sacking in the closet of the other stable hand, Elijah Green, plus two Indian clubs and a strange-sounding note, so he's putting his money on the darkie as the assailant."

Seymour grinned. "You're right, you've got more possibilities than the prince at a garden party. And speaking of George, he just got in. He's in the duty room having his tea. He looks knackered too. You'd better watch it, might be something going around."

Murdoch stared at Seymour, not sure whether he was making a joke, but Charlie's face was impassive and Murdoch wondered, not for the first time, if it wasn't his own guilty conscience that was making him project judgments onto his friend. Only last Sunday, Father Fair had chosen as his homily text the sacrament of marriage, denouncing in ringing tones those sinners who had carnal knowledge of each other outside of holy wedlock. Murdoch hadn't been to confession for some weeks or he would have assumed the priest was particularly referring to him, but he'd shifted uneasily in the pew. When he was engaged to be married to Liza, both of them Roman Catholics, they had accepted, albeit impatiently, the church's injunctions to remain chaste until their marriage. That chastity had become a cruel jest when she had died so suddenly of typhoid fever and he still regretted it. But when he had declared his love to Amy and he had actually proposed marriage, she had laughed. "It's not for me, Will. We don't need any public declaration and contract to bind us together. I believe we are quite capable of determining our own destiny. If you want me in your bed, unwed but faithful, I will come happily." And so she had, and he had never known such pleasure in his life before.

Seymour snapped his fingers. "Will! Where are you? I said Crabtree claims he's got some important news."

"Oh, right! Sorry. I just went off in a little daydream."

"You certainly did." He reached underneath the desk. "I almost forgot myself. This was delivered this morning for you." He handed Murdoch a plain white envelope. There was no stamp, just his name neatly printed on the front.

Detective William Murdoch. Strictest Confidence.

"Some little street arab brought it in, but he was off before I could find out who it was from."

Murdoch tore open the envelope and took out a single sheet of paper.

For no eyes other than yours.

I would much appreciate it if you would pay me a visit.

I am still in the place where I was before. We are allowed to walk in the gardens from 5 till 6. Meet me there today. It will be private. No matter what, Murdoch, please don't let me down. I am counting on you.

Thomas Brackenreid.

P.S. As I will probably be away from the station for a while longer, you have my permission to use my personal office on such occasions as you need to.

"What is it?" Seymour asked.

Murdoch hesitated. Charlie was his friend and he respected him, but there was something about the situation with the inspector that silenced him. He'd poked fun at the man many a time and shared in the general disrespect Brackenreid had engendered in the station, but he didn't feel like betraying a confidence placed in him even if he hadn't exactly agreed to it.

"I'll tell you later." He put the envelope in his pocket. "By the way, who put the daffies out front?"

"I did." Seymour gave him a shy smile. "It was Katie's idea. She thinks the station should look a little more friendly.

Improve our relationship with the general public.”

“Quite right too. The trouble with us, Charlie, is that we think too much like men and not women.”

Seymour laughed. “I don’t know if we can do much about that, but I know what you mean. On the other hand, God save me from women who want to wear the trousers.” He stopped short. “Oh, I’m not referring to Amy. I just meant, er, metaphorically.”

“Of course.”

The door opened and a man came in. He was short and wiry with the tanned face of an outdoorsman. In spite of the mild weather, he was wearing a long caped houndstooth coat and astrakhan hat.

“Afternoon, gentlemen, I’m here to see Detective Murdoch.”

“I’m Murdoch. What can I do for you?”

The man held out his hand. “My name’s Musgrave, Paul Musgrave. I’m a cabbie at the Cooke stables. Cooke that was, may he rest in peace. Dreadful doings that, dreadful.” Musgrave’s tone and expression were cheerful. His eyes were crinkled at the sides, but whether that was from perpetual squinting into the sun or from being forever affable with his customers, Murdoch couldn’t tell.

“One of your constables came over to my house. I was having a bit of a sleep-in and I didn’t know anything that had happened. Shocking, it was. Completely shocking. Anyway, the constable and me had quite a chin wag and he told me to come here this afternoon and talk to you. So here I am.” He was chewing vigorously on a wad of tobacco, and he looked around for somewhere to spit. Simultaneously, both Murdoch and Seymour pointed at the closest spittoon and Musgrave skilfully deposited a stream of juice. He wiped his mouth with the back of his sleeve. “Don’t worry about keeping me from my work. Today, I couldn’t get a customer to get inside my cab if I paid him. Sunshine’s bad for business, it is, especially in the spring. Hot summer’s better,

but then, most of the time, the ladies don't want to go out at all, do they?"

"Come with me then, Mr. Musgrave. Sergeant, would you tell Constable Crabtree to join us as soon as he can."

Murdoch began to lead the way to his cubicle at the rear of the station, then he halted. Why not? He went back to Seymour and whispered, "Charlie, believe it or not, Inspector Brackenreid has offered me the use of his office while he is away. Tell George to come up there."

Seymour gaped at him. "You're joking with me."

"Not at all. His exact words were 'You have my permission to use my office on such occasions as you need to.' I'm counting this as an occasion."

Charlie grinned. "Be careful, Will, you might get to like being an inspector."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

“Got a new chair, did you, sir?” Musgrave asked.

Murdoch stopped abruptly. He’d taken a seat behind the inspector’s desk and was enjoying testing the chair that tilted and revolved. He stopped quickly.

“Something like that,” he muttered.

The top of the desk was pristine except for a tray filled with papers, the first one marked urgent. He’d better have a look at that later. Couldn’t let down the reputation of station number four, after all. To the side of the desk was a squat walnut boxy container that he hadn’t seen before. On the top was an ivory button, which he pressed. Immediately the sides of the box sprung open, revealing rows of cigars held in by a wire frame. Murdoch hesitated. Borrowing the office was one thing, taking cigars that didn’t belong to him was another. Nobly, he closed it again.

There was a tap at the door.

“Come in,” Murdoch called, and George Crabtree entered. If he was surprised to see Murdoch sitting behind the desk, he didn’t show it.

“George, Mr. Musgrave is about to give me his formal statement. Write it down for me, will you?” Crabtree would spot any discrepancies or embellishments to what he’d

already heard. "Mr. Musgrave, will you proceed? Start with your name and address please."

The cabbie removed his tobacco plug from his mouth and wrapped it in his handkerchief, which from the look of it had been used in this way many times before.

"My name is Paul Musgrave and I live at 210 Wilton Street."

"How long have you worked for Daniel Cooke?"

"Oh, 'bout three years now."

"What sort of employer was Mr. Cooke?"

Musgrave slapped his hand on his knee. "As good as they come. Conscientious to a fault. He was there when we booked out and sitting waiting when we booked back in. Mind you, he kept his distance, which is only proper, in my opinion. People will take advantage if you don't, it's only human nature. But you always knew where you stood with him. Pay your dues and he was pleasant as could be. We rents out the cabs, you see, and we pay that no matter what. One dollar a shift, which you've got to make up in your fares. We keeps what we take in, but we pass over 5 per cent of that to Cooke for wear and tear, as he calls it." He rubbed his hand over his face. "Or should I say, *called it*, may he rest in peace. That's why he was always on us to look at our dockets, which, as you know, the city council has strict rules about. In the first division, which is city limits, it's fifty cents. If you go to the second division, that is to Dufferin Street West or Pape in the east, it goes up to seventy-five cents."

Murdoch had been scribbling the figures in his notebook, and he made some quick calculations.

"If all you cabbies were getting steady business, I'd say Mr. Cooke could make a decent income even after paying for upkeep of the horses and carriages."

"He could. And we are in a prime location. A lot of professional men in the vicinity. Not all of them keep their own carriages, or if they do, the gentleman uses it. This

means the ladies like to hire us to take them shopping or on their calls and so forth. We have a lot of regulars for that reason."

Crabtree gave a little discrete cough. "Mr. Musgrave had something else to say about the money, Mr. Murdoch."

"Yes?"

The cabbie settled back in his chair. "In spite of what I just told you, being a cab driver is a thankless job when you get right down to it. You never can say from one day to the next what money you're going to bring in. The best days are those when it starts off sunny but rains in the afternoon, so all the ladies get out to do their shopping, then get caught. Rainy all day long is not as good as you think because they don't want to go out. Same with cold. But I always tries to be pleasant and cheerful and I get a lot of steady customers. Especially because the stables is right near Shuter Street, I'll have a call a lot of times from the doctors' nurses that Mrs. So-and-So would like me to pick her up. They often gives me a nice gratuity. Them's the best jobs."

Murdoch waited. He could see by Crabtree's expression, Musgrave hadn't got to the point yet. The constable leaned forward.

"Tell the detective about Mr. Cooke's attitude to money."

"Right. Well as I was saying, the cabbie's life is an unpredictable one. Mr. Cooke was doing all right in my opinion, but lately he's been, that is, was, quite testy. Not like him at all. He was on us about working harder and kept saying as how we had to go after fares, not just wait for them to fall into our laps. He was starting to ride us to the point of aggravation. I don't know what had got into him. He didn't used to be like that. Not that I'm speaking ill of the dead, you understand, he was one of the best."

Another long pause. The cabbie was apparently studying the plant in the window.

"Go on, Musgrave. We don't have all day," said Crabtree, finally losing patience.

"Sorry, officer. Your aspidistra looks a bit wilted. It needs watering, I'd say."

"Mr. Musgrave, please continue," said Murdoch.

The cabbie nodded. "Here it is then. It's my belief there's been something going on with Mr. Cooke and the darkie."

"Elijah Green?"

"Him. Mind you, I'd never utter a bad word about the man except under these circumstances. He's been a good worker, I'd say. Makes sure the carriages are all spic and span and the horses fit, which you've got to have if you're in the business...but two times this month I came in a bit later than expected and I saw him in the office with Mr. Cooke and they were having a barney. A big up-and-a-downer, by the look of it."

"What about?" Murdoch asked.

"Wish I could help you there, but I can't. I come in the other end of the barn so I couldn't quite hear them, but I saw Mr. Cooke grab Green by his shirt. He was mad as the devil about something."

"What did Green do?"

"Nothing. He sort of shrugged him off, but I thought he was furious too."

"This happened twice, you say?"

"That's right. Once about two weeks ago and the other time was just this past Tuesday."

"The day before Mr. Cooke died?"

"Yes. It was just after eleven at night. Like I said, I was a bit later than expected."

"Was the earlier quarrel the same? Did Cooke grab Green?"

"Not that time. But he was yelling, I could see that. He banged his fist on the desk."

"Did you say anything to Green?"

"Not the first time, but when he came in I sort of made a joke of it. 'The boss found you cheating on the hay bills, did

he?"

"And?"

"Nothing. He just sort of shrugged and said something about the boss getting out of bed the wrong way. But if looks could kill, I wouldn't be sitting here talking to you today."

"That's it, then? That's what you have to tell us?"

Musgrave looked distinctly aggrieved at the question. "That's more than enough, ain't it? The darkie is a deep one. I'm a good judge of character, you have to be if you're a cabbie. You see all sides of human nature, and I tell you he keeps a lot hidden."

"Did any of the other cabbies ever quarrel with Mr. Cooke? Did you yourself, for instance?"

Musgrave shrugged. "Me and him got along good. The others I couldn't really say. Wallace is as sour as a pickle, so he and Mr. Cooke weren't exactly chummy, but I don't know as you'd call that a quarrel exactly. Besides, there's always going to be the odd squabble where a man's livelihood is concerned. Sometimes, Mr. Cooke would take a bigger cut if he thought you'd run the horse too hard or if there was any damage to the carriages. But like I said, he was a shrewd businessman. You can't be too soft or people won't give you any respect."

"That happened to you, did it?"

"Once or twice."

"You know, don't you, that we received a complaint that the horses in the livery were being mistreated."

For the first time, Musgrave lost some of his affability. Without the crinkly eyed smile, his face was hard. "Some interfering old so-and-so, I gather. No doubt a silly old dame who don't understand what a cabbie's life is like. I love my horses like they was my own children. But the truth is the more fares we get in an hour, the more money we makes. And if customers want you to scorch them down to the

station so's they'll catch their train, I ain't going to say no, am I? They give big bonuses, some of them doctors."

"Mr. Cooke objected, did he? Wearing out his horses like that?"

"Not him. He knew that's the life of a cab horse, isn't it?"

He pulled a big steel watch out of his waistcoat pocket and stared at it. "I should get back to work. This is costing me money, you know."

"Is the livery operational, then?"

"According to Mrs. Cooke it is."

"You've talked to her, have you?"

Musgrave went still. His cold blue eyes were wary. "Yes, she was good enough to come over to my lodgings this morning. Even in the depths of her grief she is a considerate woman. She wanted to tell me what had happened."

"I've heard that there is a special relationship between you and she. Is that true?"

Musgrave's slapped his hands on his knees in anger. "Who's been gossiping behind my back, and the poor woman a new-made widow. Who said that?"

"It doesn't matter who said it, Mr. Musgrave. Is it true?"

"So help me God, it is not. At least not in the sense you're implying. She's got a good heart, has Adelaide Cooke, and to tell you the truth, her husband neglected her pitifully. You can't do that to a woman and expect her not to get real lonesome. She liked to go to concerts and so do I, and what's the harm in a man accompanying a lady to a concert once in a while, for God's sake?"

"I see no harm, Mr. Musgrave, no harm at all. Unfortunately others seemed to have, er, misconstrued the situation."

Musgrave was still fuming, but Murdoch thought it had the hue of a man who'd been found out rather than one innocent of wrongdoing.

The cabbie got to his feet. "I'm going to miss the afternoon calls if I don't go soon. Is that all you want to ask me?"

"Not quite. We found a whip that belongs to the carriage you use. Did you know it was missing?"

"It wasn't when I checked in last night. Cabbies are always borrowing from one another, a whip, a lantern, whatever it is they need at the time and are too lazy to replace. Why does it matter?"

"Let's say it's part of our investigation. But before you go, there is one more question. Can you give an account of your whereabouts between eight o'clock and half past nine on Wednesday night?"

Musgrave showed his teeth in what might pass for a smile. "That's easy. After I signed out at about half past seven, I decided to wet my whistle at the John O'Neil on Queen Street. I was there till closing time at ten. You can ask them."

"I will. That's it for now, but I will probably have to talk to you again."

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, but I don't see why. I've given you the best information you're likely to get. It's Elijah Green you should be talking to, not honest, decent men like me."

"I'll keep that in mind, Mr. Musgrave. Constable Crabtree will escort you downstairs."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Murdoch swivelled in the chair. "George, did you ever play blind man's bluff when you were a titch?"

"Yes, I did, sir."

"Well, I feel as Mr. Musgrave was having just such a game with us, trying to turn us round and round so that we don't know where we are. Going on about what a good man Mr. Cooke was, while making sure he painted a picture of an avaricious, cold-hearted tyrant. And the same with Green. 'A good fellow all round,' but capable of killing somebody if he's crossed. He quite made me dizzy, did Mr. Musgrave."

"He was a slippery one all right, but there's no reason to believe he wasn't telling the truth about the negro having a quarrel with Cooke. I thought he was giving me a lot of gammon about how that blood got on the sacking. I'll wager the boss gave him a stotter over something or other and that's where he got his goose egg from."

Murdoch frowned. "Maybe, but I'm putting my money on Musgrave. He's got the soul of a rat if ever I saw one."

"He did give us an alibi."

"Come off it, George. You know what the O'Neil's like. I'd as soon try to hold water in a sieve than catch the truth from the lot who frequent that place."

"I suppose you could be right about that, sir," said Crabtree reluctantly.

Murdoch whipped the chair around again. "There's something that bothers me about this whole business. Cooke wasn't blindfolded, so I have to assume his attacker didn't mean for him to live, otherwise he would have been identified. Was the intention to whip him to death?"

"Perhaps his attacker meant to shoot him. The revolver has disappeared, after all."

"Yes, I thought of that. Perhaps Cooke died too soon for his attacker to use it. Or he already knew Cooke had a weak heart. The disturbing thing, George, is that according to Dr. Ogden and her friend Professor Broske, some of the lashes were administered after Cooke was dead. That changes the picture quite a bit, I'd say. Did somebody hate Cooke that much? Or are we dealing with a lunatic?"

Crabtree shifted his feet. "I think that bears out what I'm saying about the darkie. You said yourself Cooke owed him back wages. Maybe he *was* intending to beat him to death."

Murdoch shook his head. "I find that hard to believe, George. For one thing, surely it would take a long time to actually bring about death? You would have to be extraordinarily determined, not to mention callous, to do that."

"Musgrave saw them have a barney."

"If he's to be believed, but even he didn't describe it as a blazing row, just raised voices and a shove on Cooke's part. That doesn't sound too lethal to me."

"You don't know what will send a man over the edge though, do you, sir? Besides, we can't forget about the mysterious messenger. Whatever it was he had to say, he got Cooke up from his supper pretty fast. And this cove was a coloured man, sir. He could have been an accomplice of Green's."

"Let's go and ask the man in person, shall we, George?" Murdoch swung around in the chair once more. "I've quite

enjoyed our little stay in the inspector's crib. Rather more comfortable than my cubicle, wouldn't you say?"

"I would indeed, sir. No offence. When is Mr. Brackenreid due to return? Is he recovered from his influenza?"

"I don't know, George, but in the meantime, I see no reason why we shouldn't avail ourselves of his generous offer and conduct all further interviews here." He stood up. "Perhaps it will all be very simple and Green will confess on the spot."

Murdoch and Crabtree retrieved their wheels from the shed and set off for Terauley Street. The afternoon sun was gilding the spires of both St. Michael's Cathedral and the Metropolitan Church just below it, making no distinction between Catholic and Protestant, both equally blessed for once. They'd bicycled in silence for a while. Murdoch thought Crabtree was looking peaked.

"Are you feeling unwell, George?"

"Oh no, sir. I'm in the pink, just a little tired. Billy is getting the last of his teeth in so he's mardy as all get out."

"Katie rubbed her twins' gums with oil of cloves and gave them stale crusts to chew. That seemed to give them relief."

"Ellen's thinking of having his gums lanced. We did it with George junior and he was all smiles within the hour."

They biked on, both lost in the burdens of domesticity. Murdoch had come to dote on Katie Tibbett's twins, and he found himself more and more thinking about what it would be like to have his own family, even mardy children. Without realizing it, he sighed deeply and Crabtree glanced over at him.

"How's the house working out, sir? Is Miss Slade as ever, er, that is, is Miss Slade...?"

Murdoch rescued him. "She is still a fierce advocate and representative of the New Woman, if that's what you mean,

George."

"Ah, yes. You must have some lively chins about that."

"We certainly do."

Murdoch wasn't going to unburden himself to his constable about the nature of those talks.

"Speaking of Ellen, how is your better half, George?"

An expression of unhappiness crossed the constable's face. "As well as can be expected, sir, considering." He looked embarrassed and his voice tailed off.

"Good heavens, don't tell me she's in the family way again?"

"As a matter of fact, she is."

"Are you planning to start a colony or something, George? What's this, number five?"

"Yes, sir. I mean, er, it's our fifth, not that we're starting a colony."

For no reason that he could think of, Murdoch felt irritated. It was none of his business and he liked the constable, but there were many days lately when Crabtree seemed tired and out of sorts. Then he usually mumbled something about the baby keeping him awake. And now there'd be another one before this one was out of nappies.

He realized Crabtree had been saying something to him.

"...it's hard to know what to do. We thought that because Ellen was still nursing we wouldn't, er, I mean, er, there was less likelihood of getting a baby, but that proved not to be the case."

Good heavens, George was confiding in him.

"To tell you the truth, sir, she had a very difficult time with the last one and she's fair worn out. She's at her wit's end about what to do."

Murdoch didn't have the vaguest idea what to reply, so he just nodded sympathetically.

"Beg your pardon, sir. I shouldn't be talking like this."

"Not at all, George. I wish I could be of more help. Have you spoken to your physician?"

“Yes, sir. He just prescribed her a tonic.”

“That should help then.” Murdoch knew how lame that sounded.

Crabtree sighed, tucking the brief intimacy back inside his heart. “Yes, sir. I’m sure it will.”

Terauley Street was on the western side of Yonge Street, an area of the city that Murdoch didn’t often visit, as most of his working life was concentrated on the area covered by number four division. Yonge Street on the western perimeter to River Street in the east, Carlton in the north, and Front Street in the south. A diverse population lived within its boundaries from very rich to very poor, expansive private grounds standing next to dirty foundries belching black smoke all day.

They crossed Yonge Street as quickly as they could, dodging the carriages that were clogging the city’s main thoroughfare. Elijah Green’s house was the end one of a row of narrow two-storey houses. There was no front yard, and they leaned their wheels against the wall of the house. Murdoch knocked hard on the door, which had once been blue but now needed a new coat of paint. The curtains of the windows at 262 were whisked aside. Murdoch had a glimpse of a dark face, then the curtain was dropped immediately. Before he could knock a second time, the door opened and a woman with a child close at her side stood in the threshold. She was a negress perhaps thirty years of age. The child, a curly haired boy, was six or seven. He shrank into his mother’s skirt when he saw Crabtree in his tall helmet towering in front of them.

“Mrs. Green?” Murdoch tipped his hat.

She nodded nervously.

“Good afternoon, ma’am. My name is Murdoch. I’m a detective at number four station. This is Constable Crabtree. I wonder if I might have a word with your husband?”

Her eyes flickered away. “He’s resting right now.”

“Would you mind fetching him? I’m sorry to have to disturb him, but it is important.”

She tapped the boy on the shoulder. “Donnie, go get your pa.” The boy scuttled away.

The woman didn’t move or make any attempt to bring them into the house, and there was an awkward silence while they all waited.

“It’s been a lovely day, hasn’t it?” said Murdoch. “I do believe spring has finally arrived.”

Her brown eyes met his. She revealed nothing, but suddenly Murdoch felt foolish. She was a frightened woman and him uttering such banalities was absurd.

“Do you mind if we come in?” he asked, his voice gentle. “We want to ask some questions and I don’t think we can do that standing in the street.”

Suddenly Green appeared, his son right behind him. He had heard these words.

“Of course you can come in, Mr. Murdoch.” He nodded at Crabtree. “I don’t know about you, constable. You might be bumping your head on the ceiling.”

He stepped back so he could usher them in. “This is my wife, Mary Ann. Donnie here, who is going to take his thumb out of his mouth, ’cause he’s a big boy now, is my middle sprout.”

The door opened directly into the living room, and Crabtree did have to bend his head to go through the low threshold. Opposite the door was a staircase partly curtained off at the bottom, but the family essentially occupied one room shaped like a L, in the foot of which Murdoch glimpsed a cooking range and a sink. Two girls were seated at a table near the fire, both of them had sewing on their laps. They, too, regarded Murdoch and Crabtree with considerable alarm.

Green spoke to them sharply. “Sophie and Alexandra, take your work upstairs. You too, Donnie.”

They didn't utter a word but bundled the cloths they were working on and hurried up the staircase. Green pulled the curtain closed after them. "We can sit at the table," he said. "My wife will brew us some tea."

Murdoch was about to refuse, but she was already heading for the little kitchen alcove and he didn't want to give offence. He sat down, Crabtree squeezing himself into the chair opposite. Green's home was very different from Talbert's. Not only was it much smaller, it was furnished with mismatched furniture. The plank floor was covered with multi-coloured rag rugs and the armchairs had cheery crocheted covers flung over them. It was like many another workmen's cottage he'd been in. Green took the chair across from him and Crabtree. He sat quietly, waiting for them to start, but Murdoch could feel his tension. Was he capable of inflicting such violence on an older man? Physically yes, easily, but mentally Murdoch couldn't believe it.

Green put his hands on the table. The knuckles were swollen and criss-crossed with small scars. He saw Murdoch looking at his hands and immediately removed them and placed them on his knees. Then his eyes met Murdoch's.

"I suppose you're going to arrest me," he said, his voice dead.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Suddenly the curtains across the bottom of the stairs were whisked aside and a man came through into the room.

"I heard that, you foolish brother, you. Of course they ain't gonna charge you." He was younger than Green, not as tall, and heavier and much darker-skinned. Whereas Green had given the impression of well-contained strength, Murdoch thought this man looked on the verge of explosive rage. On the other hand, that impression could have been created by the fact he was wearing only summer trousers and a white undervest that seemed too small for him and accentuated his muscular shoulders and arms. His feet were bare.

"You are?" asked Murdoch.

"Lincoln Green, his brother. And you are?" His tone was one of barely reined-in insolence.

"I'm Detective William Murdoch from number four station. This is Constable Crabtree. We are investigating the death of Daniel Cooke. Your brother worked for him."

"I know that. So did several other men, are you questioning them as well?"

"Linc, watch your manners," Elijah intervened in a sharp voice. "The detective has a job to do."

"In answer to your question," said Murdoch, "yes, we are. Why wouldn't we?"

Lincoln gave him an odd look, then lowered his head and muttered. "Where there's trouble, it always lands first on us coloured folk."

"Trouble ends up with them that deserves it," said Crabtree.

Lincoln looked as if he was about to give an angry retort, but his brother touched him on the arm. "Why don't you join us, Linc, and hear what the officers have to say for themselves?" He waited until Lincoln took the remaining seat at the table, then he turned to Murdoch. "My brother sometimes comes over to the stables if I need an extra hand. He's familiar with the routine and the other cabbies."

"You didn't mention that before."

"It didn't seem important. It only happens occasionally."

"Where does he work normally?"

"I haul freight down at the harbour," interjected Lincoln, but Murdoch didn't respond to him. He thought he'd put a bit of pressure on the situation by being deliberately rude.

"Does he know what happened?" he asked Elijah.

"I do." Lincoln answered for himself, clearly nettled. "Cooke got a thorough whipping."

"That sounds like you thought he deserved it," said Murdoch.

"No, it don't. I was just stating a fact. It ain't for me to say if he deserved it or not, although -"

Elijah gave him another warning glance and he subsided a little. "Don't mind my brother, Mr. Murdoch. We're both worried about the situation." He gave a rueful grin. "I'm probably looking like a good bet to pin the whole thing on. At least your constable seems to think so."

"I'm interested in the truth and the facts, Mr. Green, not speculation." Murdoch hadn't intended it as a reprimand to Crabtree, but the expression that crossed the constable's face told him it had been taken as such. He turned back to

Elijah. "There are one or two things I need to clarify with you. I was speaking to Paul Musgrave, and he said there was bad blood between you and Mr. Cooke, that you'd had a couple of rows recently."

Elijah looked down at the table and began to fidget with a knife that had been left there. "I thought he'd get around to dropping that sooner or later. The so-called row weren't no more than happens between any boss and his stable hand from time to time. I wouldn't call it bad blood. That implies something ongoing and it weren't."

"What did you quarrel about?"

"Nothing serious. He'd got behind with my wages and I was asking him for what was my due. He liked to hold on to his money till the last minute so he was trying to fob me off."

His explanation didn't quite fit the picture that Musgrave had drawn, which suggested Cooke was the aggrieved man, but Murdoch let it go for now.

Lincoln leaned forward. "There's a lot more to this than my brother is letting on. Musgrave has it in for him and has for a long time. He's hard on his horses and Elijah challenged him more than once. He didn't like that. Thought the nigger man was stepping out of place, so he held it against him. He'd snatch at any chance he could to make trouble."

"Is that true?" Murdoch asked Elijah.

"It's true what Linc says about Musgrave misusing his horses, and it's true that I did challenge him about it. He's a man that holds grudges for all he looks like a friendly gnome. But he wasn't lying about me having a barney with Mr. Cooke. I saw him standing outside in the yard, trying to listen, but he wouldn't have known what we was quarrelling about so I guess he's free to speculate all he wants."

Elijah Green was a convincing witness, and Murdoch thought a clever one or an honest one or both.

"Why did you ask earlier if we were going to charge you?"

"You had a certain look about you."

Crabtree snorted in disgust, and it was Murdoch's turn to cast a warning glance. "Mr. Cooke says that money is missing from the safe. A lot of money. Do you know about that?"

"No."

"Did you know the combination?"

"No. The boss was very careful on that matter. He wouldn't open it if anybody was there. He sent me out of the room more than once in case I saw what he was doing."

There was the merest inflection of contempt in his voice.

"Mr. Cooke also said her husband kept a revolver in the drawer. It's not there. Did you know about that?"

"Yes, that weren't no secret. He was mortal afraid of robbers. He made sure everybody who worked for him knew he had a weapon."

"Had he ever been robbed?"

"Not in the twenty-odd years I've worked there." Elijah gave a sly grin. "I guess the threat worked."

"His wife says he surprised an intruder just three months ago. Did you know about that?"

"No, I didn't. He never mentioned it."

There was silence for a moment and Crabtree shifted in his chair. It was too small for him, but then most chairs were. Murdoch knew his constable was getting impatient. He wanted to return to the station with the suspect in cuffs. He heard the floorboards creaking overhead and he wondered if Mrs. Green was sitting at the top of the stairs, listening the way Lincoln had been. She had seemed so nervous when they came in, and Elijah and Lincoln were both tense and wary. Was it as simple as they said, a negro family on the fringes of a crime that they feared they might be easily blamed for?

"Mr. Green, I understand you sometimes sleep on a cot in the barn, and during his search, my constable here found some articles that might be viewed with suspicion."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Lincoln burst out.

"Exactly what I said, no more and no less. We are investigating a suspicious death and among things, we find a blood-stained piece of sacking apparently hidden -"

"It wasn't hidden," interrupted Elijah.

"Yes, it was. You never said you had a hideaway up there." It was Crabtree's turn to raise his voice.

"I never said anything because it isn't. It's just a place I kip down in if I have to. I explained about the sacking."

Elijah looked away. Lincoln was staring at the scrubbed table, not moving.

"Did you sleep there on Tuesday?" Murdoch asked.

"I did. Like I said, I was concerned about one of the horses."

Murdoch took out the envelope he had brought with him and handed Elijah the piece of paper Crabtree had found.

"You have admitted that this is your handwriting, but you have refused to say what is the significance of the words."

"There isn't no particular significance."

Lincoln glanced over and made an overly hearty gesture.

"I know what that is, Elijah. Them's the words you made up for little Donnie so he could practise his handwriting. Show them."

Elijah nodded. "Right. Of course they are."

"Does the child have a notebook I can see?" Murdoch asked. Catch them in the small details and they'll trip up on the bigger lies. But he saw immediately he hadn't trapped them. Lincoln got up and went over to the kitchen where the children had been earlier. He made rather a point of shifting away some newspaper. "Ah here it is." He returned to the

table with a dog-eared scribbler, opened it, and handed it to Murdoch.

The last page was filled with a large, childish scrawl and sure enough there were the words from the piece of paper: *The Master . Advance , Retreat ,* and so on.

"You look surprised, detective. Did you think coloured folk don't know how to read and write?"

"'Course he don't think that, Linc. But does that answer your question, Mr. Murdoch?"

"Why didn't you tell the constable that at the time? Constable Crabtree said you wouldn't offer any explanation and you were quite belligerent with him."

Elijah looked down at the table. "Begging your pardon, sir. But the constable was trampling all over my own place as it were. I got riled up a bit, that's all. I didn't feel like answering what is nobody's business but my own. And Linc here can attest to the fact that I have a stubborn streak a mile wide."

"That's right, he does."

Elijah tapped on the sheet of paper. "I can see looking at this list of words, they might seem odd but they don't really seem relevant to what happened to Mr. Cooke, do they? I mean there is 'hit' and 'mark' and 'fall,' but that's about it."

You are a cunning fox, aren't you? Murdoch thought. There's just enough plausibility in what you're saying. Enough but not sufficient. He decided to try another tack.

"Mrs. Cooke told us that her husband received a message while he was finishing his supper that seemed to alarm him. He rushed out immediately but didn't tell her why." The two brothers were both looking at him now with real curiosity.

"The butler said the message was delivered by a man he hadn't seen before. He described him as stocky build, about five-foot-four or-five inches tall. He was wearing a fedora pulled down tight over his eyes, a long dark overcoat, and he had a white muffler wrapped around the

lower part of his face. It was a fairly mild night, so I am assuming the scarf was to disguise him rather than for warmth. There wasn't a good light in the porch so the butler can't give a really good description. However, he is sure the man was a negro."

Lincoln pounded on the table. "What do you mean, 'sure he was a negro'?"

"His skin was dark."

"Anybody can black their faces and pretend to be one of us. Only last month our pastor had to go to city council and protest about the minstrel show that was coming to town. They're all white men and they daub on burnt cork and paint their lips red and never heed for a minute that they are insulting us coloured folk. It would be easy for a white man to darken himself and make out he was a negro."

Crabtree was making it obvious what he thought, but Murdoch didn't answer. It was something he hadn't considered. Lincoln was quite right, and if it was true what he said, the messenger had certainly succeeded in throwing suspicion onto the stable hand.

"Has anybody been around the livery recently who might fit the description I just gave you?" Murdoch asked.

Elijah shook his head. "Nobody."

Lincoln poked him. "What about that coloured woman you told us about? She was a stranger. You should tell the detective what happened. We want to help him solve his case, don't we?"

Elijah shrugged. "There's nothing to tell, really. This woman was just a casual visitor. She only came by once. About a week ago, it was."

"What did she want?"

"She said she was the personal maid for an American visitor, a widow lady who wanted to inquire about hiring a cab privately while she was in town. That's all there was to it. She said she would come back the next day and make final arrangements, but she never did."

"Can you describe this woman?" Murdoch asked.

"I suppose so. She was dark-skinned, medium height, a bit on the stout side."

He paused, clearly reluctant to say much.

"What else?" Murdoch asked impatiently. "What was she wearing? How old would you say?"

Elijah shrugged. "Quite well dressed but very sober, as I recall. Her walking suit was navy or black. She had on a felt hat with a bit of ribbon, but, as I say, all very plain. Age? Not young, probably close to fifty."

"And you'd never seen her before?"

"Never."

"She could have been scouting out the place," said Lincoln. "Whoever attacked Mr. Cooke knew there wouldn't be anybody around on Wednesdays after half past seven."

"How did you know what time Mr. Cooke died?" Murdoch jumped in.

Lincoln grinned. "Elijah told me he found him at half past nine. He locked the stable sharp at half past seven, then came home for his supper. What happened must have been between those two times. And in case you was wondering, we were all of us here and can vouch for him."

Murdoch looked at Elijah. "Why did you bother to come home? You had to get right back again to feed the horses. Why didn't you stay at the stables?"

"My children like to see their pa before they go to bed. My wife and me say their prayers with them. So I come home whenever I can."

"I could call them down here and ask them if that's true," said Murdoch.

That got a reaction out of Lincoln especially, but Elijah also tensed. "It's your right to do that, mister. They've been brought up to be truthful, but if it isn't absolutely necessary, I'd prefer they were left out of it. It'll only upset them. Look, we have a Bible over there on the dresser. If you want me

to, I'll swear on it that I didn't have nothing to do with Mr. Cooke's death."

His brother shoved back his chair and went to the dresser. "Here's the Good Book, mister. I'll swear on it too if that'll keep you away from those children. We're telling the truth."

He brought a large black Bible to the table and stood with it at the ready. Murdoch waved him away. "This isn't a law court. Was anybody else in the barn when this strange woman appeared?"

"There may have been, I don't really remember. If the cabbies aren't working they sit out in the room next to the tack room, but she didn't come in really, just stood in the doorway."

"And that was all she said to you, that she wanted to hire a carriage?"

Elijah bit his lip. "I suppose we remarked about the rain. It was coming down cats and dogs at that point...oh, she did ask me about church. She said she'd heard about a preacher named Archer and she wondered if he was still with us because she wanted to go to church. I said as how he was elderly now and wasn't preaching any more but Pastor Laing was and he could drum up as powerful a sermon as I ever heard. She asked where the church was, I told her, and that's it."

"Did the woman mention where she was staying?"

"No, she didn't. As I said, the encounter only lasted five minutes or so."

"I'm surprised you did remember such a casual meeting when you have such a busy job."

Elijah gave him the same rueful smile. "Mr. Murdoch, if you're a coloured man, you remember another coloured folk coming into your barn even if there was a hundred white folk passing through."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

It wasn't hard to tell that Constable Crabtree was angry, and when they got outside to where they'd left their wheels, he couldn't contain it any longer.

"I know you've got your reasons, Mr. Murdoch, but for the life of me I don't see why you didn't clap the cuffs on that man. On both of them, for that matter. As guilty a pair as I've ever seen."

"They were willing to swear on the Bible, George."

"Ha. That might mean something to men like me and you but not to them. You might as well hand the city directory to a savage and get him to swear his oath on it. Don't mean nothing. You notice how quick they were to offer when you said you'd question the children. They might have had a different tale to tell before their pa got to them. I was sorry you didn't go and get them like you said you would."

Murdoch was surprised at his constable's vehemence. George was normally mild-mannered and kind in his dealings with people of lesser status.

The constable continued, "That story about another darkie coming to the stables. That was intended to throw us off the scent. You did give away a description of the so-called messenger."

Murdoch winced. "That was probably a mistake."

“Not if they were innocent it wasn’t, but Green conveniently remembered the woman after you said that.”

“Why say it was a woman, though? If he was lying, why not just say a man who fitted the description the butler gave us came to the stables?”

“He’s cunning, that’s why. Didn’t want to make it too obvious. I’d wager both him and his brother are in on the attack. You said yourself you thought it would have taken two people. I’d bet Lincoln was the one who went to Cooke’s house, wrote something that would bring him running, and there they were waiting for him. They intended to kill him after the whipping. It had to be somebody who knew the stable would be empty of cabbies and also somebody who could get in. If you want my opinion, sir, we should get a warrant and search that house top to toe, if it isn’t too late, that is.”

They biked on for a while longer, not talking. Murdoch chewed over what Crabtree had said, some of which he’d thought himself. However, in spite of the nagging dissatisfaction, he’d been inclined to believe both brothers. It wasn’t just the resort to the Bible that had convinced him, he thought Green’s concern for his children was genuine.

“I’m going to proceed initially as if what Green said is true about this visitor. It may be important, it may not, but at least if we find her, we’ll know if he was telling the truth. A middle-aged woman isn’t going to walk too far in the pouring rain. The weather was terrible all last week. I know I didn’t even get out my wheel. If she is indeed a visitor with her mistress, they must have been staying not too far away.”

They were approaching Church Street as the bell of St. James Cathedral tolled out the half-hour. Murdoch braked hard. Crabtree sailed on until he realized what was happening. Murdoch called after him.

“There’s somebody I have to see, George. I’ll join you at the station in an hour.”

Crabtree turned back. "Is there anything I should do in the meantime, sir?"

"Get me a list of all the hotels and guest houses that are within walking distance of the livery. Most hotels these days have telephones and so does the livery. I'm wondering why if this unknown woman wanted a cab, she didn't ring for one."

Crabtree couldn't hide his skepticism, but he saluted, remounted, and biked off while Murdoch retraced his path, heading for the Ollapod Club.

He was there in less than five minutes. The house was a grand pile surrounded by well-tended grounds and a high wrought-iron fence. A discrete brass plaque on the gate read, *Please ring the bell for admittance*. Murdoch was about to obey when suddenly a man virtually leaped out from behind one of the trees that lined the path and hissed, "Don't touch it." For a brief second, Murdoch thought a lunatic was addressing him, then he recognized Inspector Brackenreid. He was dressed in indoor clothes, bedroom garb to be exact. A blue velvet dressing gown underneath which his white stockinged, rather bandy legs protruded. He had on leather slippers and a night cap with a tassel. His hair was wild and dishevelled.

"Come through quickly, Murdoch. They mustn't see you."

He opened the gate and hustled Murdoch by the arm to the shelter of the big tree.

"Sir -"

"Shh. Don't talk just yet." Brackenreid peered around the tree trunk. "All clear. Follow me."

He scuttled across the lawn to a big maple and Murdoch had no choice but to follow him. Once there, Brackenreid did the same careful scanning of the territory, then beckoning, he took off again, this time to a small shed tucked beneath

some evergreens farther away from the house. He flung open the door and dragged Murdoch inside. It was a tool shed and smelled of earth, overlaid with the pungent aroma of cigars. There was a chair in there and an upturned box. Brackenreid plumped himself down on the box. He was panting.

“Sit down, Murdoch. We don’t have a lot of time. They’ll be looking for me soon.”

Cautiously Murdoch took the seat, afraid the inspector had taken leave of his senses.

Brackenreid saw his expression and he flapped his hands irritably. “I’m quite sane, don’t worry. But this place is beset with rules and if you break them you lose privileges. That’s why I’m still in these damn nightclothes. You know me, punctuality is not one of my virtues. I was late for meals two times in a row. They take your clothes away when you’re first admitted and you only get them back if you do what you’re told and follow the rules.”

The late-afternoon sun was fading rapidly and the shed was gloomy. However, Murdoch could see well enough the changes in the inspector’s face and body. He was several pounds lighter than when Murdoch had seen him last and most of the puffiness around his eyes had gone. Except that his hair was standing on end, he looked much healthier.

“The program does seem to be agreeing with you, if I may say so, sir.”

Brackenreid snarled at him. “I might as well be in one of our own jails. Every minute of the day is accounted for. There are morning meetings with prayers, hot baths in the afternoon with a massage every second day. They claim that music heals you, so in the evening there is singing together or a musical entertainment that consists of caterwauling violins most of the time. I suppose you could call that healing, if you mean it makes you want to get out of here as fast as you can. If it’s not that it’s a talk by Cavanaugh, the Irish rogue who runs the place, or one of the former

residents who rubs it in your face how well he's doing after the cure. And all of that sandwiched between three meals a day and a morning and nighttime purge. Not to mention having to line up four times a day for our medicine."

He stood up and, moving aside a clay pot, felt along the top shelf by the door.

"Ahh, here we are." He took down the stub of a cigar and a box of matches. "They won't let us smoke either, but I was able to smuggle some of my havanas into this shed. I'd offer you one, Murdoch, but this is my last." He leaned into Murdoch and sniffed. "You've been smoking recently, unless my nose deceives me."

"Er, yes. In fact, to be honest, I took the liberty of having one of yours...when I used your office as you so generously offered me."

Murdoch watched the inspector, readying himself for a reprimand, but Brackenreid actually smiled. "You did, did you? Good, aren't they?"

"Yes, sir. Very tasty."

Brackenreid blew out some thick smoke. "We're allowed one hour private time a day," he continued. "I'm supposed to stay in the lounge, but it was mild enough to come out and walk in the grounds. I never thought I'd appreciate solitude as much. One of the worst things about this place is that fellow I sent to the station, Earl Cherry. He's my personal attendant, and he never lets me out of his sight. He's always talking to me, never stops. He's so damned encouraging, it makes me sick. Two days ago I was on the point of walking out and he stopped me. Made me stay in my room while he and Cavanaugh went through all the virtues of temperance and the vices of drink. They kept saying I was changing my life, and it was worth all the pain and torment I was going through..."

He stopped and Murdoch could see drops of spittle in the corners of his mouth.

"They do have a point, sir. You do look very well, indeed. Better than I've seen you in a few years."

"You don't understand how difficult it is. You're probably a teetotaller."

"I'm not. I enjoy a jar as much as any man. But I do know what havoc a drunk can cause in a family."

Brackenreid stared at him. "You do? How?"

"My father, actually."

Murdoch could feel the bitterness on his tongue. After all these years, it was still a painful subject. Fortunately, Brackenreid didn't press him.

Murdoch continued quickly. "I must say, sir, that I admire your resolve. It takes courage to change your ways so drastically."

Brackenreid scrutinized his face for sincerity, then he sighed. "I don't know if I can accept that compliment, Murdoch. The truth is my wife and father-in-law approached Mr. Cavanaugh, and the three of them essentially held me prisoner in my own bedroom while they brought home to me in no uncertain terms the error of my ways. Both my marriage and my job were at stake and the good opinion of everybody we knew. Cavanaugh, of course, had a lot to say about his program and how successful it was. How could I refuse?"

"That is certainly a potent argument, sir."

"It is. I was not unaware of the pain and anger I was causing to those who cared about me. Unfortunately, as Cavanaugh says, the demon drink had me firmly by the foot. He was running the show, not me. That's what we're aiming to reverse. To cast off the shackles of the slavish addiction, as he puts it, and emerge a free man. He's partial to metaphors, is Cavanaugh." He blew out more smoke.

"Why did you want to talk to me, sir? You said it was a matter of some urgency."

"Yes. I know we've had our little set-to's, Murdoch, but you're one of the few people I feel I can trust. My wife

means well, but she is completely under Cavanaugh's spell. Whatever he says is gospel for her. They want me to stay here another month until I'm completely cured, as they put it, as if I've been suffering from measles or some such thing. I don't need a cure. I'm not ill. I'm weak willed and I can't let the drink alone, no matter what I tell myself. My own father was the same and most of the people I knew, men that is, were the same as him. I despise them and I despise myself."

His voice was so harsh, Murdoch felt a pang of sympathy.

"Whatever reason we give for inebriety, surely that doesn't matter so much as the solution to the problem. Cavanaugh's has a good reputation and they claim a lot of success. If you can stand it, sir, a month should put you on the right path. After that it's just a matter of sticking to it."

"You sound like Earl. It's so easy for somebody on the outside."

He'd slipped back into self-pity, and Murdoch's momentary sympathy vanished. This was the same old Brackenreid he knew and had run foul of so many times.

Murdoch took out his pocket watch from his vest and consulted it. "I am on an investigation, sir. I can't stay much longer. What can I do to help you?"

Brackenreid stubbed out his cigar in the plant pot and fished in the pocket of his dressing gown. He pulled out a small vial of gold-coloured liquid.

"I want you to get a doctor to analyze this. The residents here are supposed to have four special concoctions a day that are Cavanaugh's secret recipes. He refuses to say what's in them. The one we get in the morning is purgative and makes you nauseous. One later on is a tonic, and the evening one probably has some laudanum to put us to sleep. But it's this I'm interested in. At two o'clock we get this, the so-called gold cure. We don't drink this one, it's injected. Most of the residents can't wait to get their shot and they say it makes them happier and

more energetic. I'd like to know what's in it." He smiled at Murdoch, another most unusual behaviour. "I'm still a copper, Will, even though I got booted upstairs and lost a grip on things. I'm curious about this. Every time I bring it up I'm told I'm just avoiding the real issues. Earl says in his solemn voice, 'These are safe medicines developed by Mr. Cavanaugh, but he doesn't want the ingredients stolen by unscrupulous competitors, so he prefers to keep them secret.' 'Come off it,' says I, 'I'm hardly likely to start a clinic for drunks. I couldn't think of anything worse.' But I can't budge him. Here, see what the doctor has to say."

"Have you received the injections yourself, sir?"

"I had to. My buttocks feel like my wife's pin cushion. It does seem to have a beneficial effect, I feel quite buoyed up afterwards, but now I'm curious about what's in it. Are they slipping in a brandy base? I've heard some places do that just to keep the residents on the hook even though they claim it's weaning them. This place is very costly, and I want to make sure it's worth it."

"I'll get on to it right -" Before Murdoch could say any more, they heard a man's voice shouting from the direction of the house.

"Tom. Thomas Brackenreid? Where are you? It's suppertime."

Brackenreid peered through the shed window. "Oh Lord, just what I thought. It's Earl. I'd better go. If he finds you here, I swear he'll have you searched. They do. It's in the best interests of the patients, they claim. Friends and family members have been caught smuggling in liquor."

"Not all of them in the city council minutes, I hope."

Brackenreid grinned at him and looked years younger. "You were a bit sly there, Murdoch. But you were right to do that. I'm not in the grip of the craving quite as much. I'm actually starting to enjoy being sober...and it's been a long time."

He peered through the window again. "Lord, he's coming here. I have to leave. Wait till we go into the house, then get out as fast as you can."

"How shall I get in touch with you when I have the analysis of the medicine?"

"I'm allowed letters, but they read them so you'll have to disguise what you write. When you are ready to meet, I'll do the same thing as I did today. I'll give Earl the slip and come over to the gate. Keep it the same time. But we'll need a code word."

"What if I write, 'Today is fire station inspection day,' and that means I'll be here."

"Excellent, Murdoch. Add bits and dabs of other things to disguise it."

"Yes, I was thinking of doing that, sir. It would sound a little odd on its own."

Brackenreid gave him a hard slap on the arm, which Murdoch interpreted as an awkward way of saying thank you.

"I'm grateful, William. I knew I could trust you."

"Tom! Mr. Brackenreid! Time to come in before you catch cold."

With a groan the inspector opened the door a crack and slipped out. Murdoch watched him hurrying across the grass toward his attendant, who greeted him warmly. Then, his arm through Brackenreid's, Earl escorted him to the house where lamps were being lit and Murdoch could see the residents lining up for their final tonic of the day. The inspector joined the end of the queue, Earl beside him.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

DECEMBER 1859

Lena daubed the goose grease ointment as gently as she could over Fidelia's lacerated back. The girl flinched but was silent. She was lying face down on a straw pallet in the lean-to, to which she and Lena had been relegated.

"You can holler if you like, Fiddie, there's nobody here. They've all gone to the meeting at the town hall."

"I ain't going to holler ever again. Not for them."

Lena continued what she was doing. She was almost blinded by her own tears but was trying to hide them from Fidelia.

"I should never have asked you to take him. You might have got away on your own. Carrying him slowed you down too much."

"Only a bit. He was good, didn't fuss hardly at all." Fidelia allowed a little smile at the corners of her mouth. "He sure done like that dried chicken I give him. I done chew it up real soft till it was like mush and stuck it in his mouth. He acted like he was a little bird in a nest and I was the mother. I thought he was gonna open up his little beak and chirp at me when I picked him up."

Lena had to stop for a moment to wipe her eyes. "If only he could have grown wings and flown to freedom."

Fidelia rolled over and sat up, wincing with the pain from her whipping. She clutched Lena's hand. "Don't fret, dear one. He's in heaven now and he surely has wings there. You know what Preacher told us just last month. Jesus done love all his children and he done pick the best to go and live in his mansion where they play all sun long and eat as much as they want and have pretty clothes and get to kiss Jesus whenever they feels like it."

"Oh, Fiddie, do you believe that?"

"Of course I does. Don't nothing else make sense otherwise. It was a comfort to remember those words when I knew your babe had died."

Lena rocked back on her heels. "And you're certain of that? Absolutely certain. There's no chance that the preacher got out before the fire?"

"I tells you, there weren't no chance at all. I done ask every-bodys I could. I done see the flames myself. That slave catcher made me look. 'See what happens to niggers who get uppity. You shouldn't have gone in there. Too bad for that preacher man. He must've knocked over a lamp or something.' But we all knew it was them white folks done throw their torches through the windows. It weren't no accident. I'd have been in that church myself, but that good old man took Ise from me and told me to get out and run like the devil himself was after me." Fidelia shuddered. "I knows them slave catchers done see me. They would have taken Ise and me both, but after the preacher says what he says, I took off from that church like a spooked horse. I was hoping I could draw them away and they would follow and they does for a bit till I fell over a foot that some fat pig of a white-folk passerby done stuck out to trip me up."

"How much later did you see the fire start?"

"Not long. There were two of them slave catchers, and one done hold me down and the other ran back to the church. He was one of them that set it on fire. Oh my dear one, I wish I could tell you something else but I can't. Ise's

with Jesus.” She grabbed Lena’s hand. “You ain’t after blaming me, is you?”

Lena embraced her. “How could I ever do that? Better he be there at peace than grow up a slave. That you got as far as you did is a miracle. You are my good and faithful friend, Fiddie. What would I do without you? And I am sorry with all my heart that the missus had you whipped so hard. And I’m sorry I had to lie and say you stole him from me. Will you forgive me for that?”

Fidelia grinned. “No sense in both of us getting whipped. Missus don’t like me, never did. She wants to break my spirit. I heard her saying so to the master. But she hates you worse and would likely have killed you if you told the truth and mister hadn’t been there.” Fidelia stroked Lena’s arm. “I’ve heard stories from Missus Craddock’s man. Moses says as there’s going to be a war coming soon and when that happens we’ll all be freed. So don’t fret, my dear one. We’ll get away from here.”

Lena touched the girl’s face tenderly. “I hope with all my heart and soul it’s true what they’re saying. But we must be ready. As soon as we can, as soon as the war is declared, we, my dearest, are going to run away as fast as our feet will carry us. I’m almost well again and even if I’m not, we’re going.”

“To the Promised Land?”

“Yes, to the Promised Land.”

“And we’ll be free?”

For a moment, Lena allowed her face to reveal the emotions she had within her all the time, subdued only by tremendous self-discipline. “I almost forget what’s that like, Fiddie. Oh I pray to the Lord that I haven’t forgotten how to live like a free woman again.”

“I ain’t never been free, not since I was borned, but don’t you fret yourself I’ll find out quick as a rat what it means. And so will you remember.”

Although they'd had this argument several times before, they still pursued it to the end, a sort of ritual, comforting in itself.

"When we're there, in the Promised Land, we can do whatever we like. You'll go to school, I'll be a fine lady again with servants of my own."

"I don't want to go to school. I'll be your servant."

"No, you won't. Dearest friends are never servants. You will be my companion, my sister. I shall ask my father to adopt you."

"What if they don't come? Them folks you're counting on. What if them chickens ain't going to hatch no how?"

"Don't be silly, Fiddie. Why wouldn't they? They've been searching all this time and just haven't found me. I know it."

"I ain't heard no stories about no man searching for his love down this way."

"He doesn't know where I am. He's searching, all right."

"But what if he does get you back, how's he going to feel knowing you had a bastard son with Leigh Dickie?"

Her words were so cruel, Lena flinched.

"I don't think he needs to know. Ise's dead, so it doesn't matter. But it will be our secret, yours and mine. To the grave, promise?"

"Promise."

"Now lie back down and I'll finish tending to you."

Fiddie did as she said, and Lena layered on more goose grease, then carefully covered the girl's back with a piece of muslin.

"He cut through the skin in a few places, so we should keep this cover on for now." She stroked the girl's hair. "See if you can sleep a bit, Fiddie. You're exhausted still. I'll do your chores for you."

Fidelia yawned. "Preacher says we must pray every day and he says as how we must forgive our enemies, but I don't think he means forgive Missus Caddie or Mister Leigh. I don't imagine even Jesus himself would forgive them."

"You're right about that. The preacher is a frightened old man. I'm not going to forgive my enemies, ever. I will never forgive the men who caused the death of my child, I will never forgive those who keep us here as slaves. And my revenge shall be terrible and exacted even on to their descendants and their descendants after that. So help me God."

Lena went out to the vegetable garden at the back of the house, leaving Fidelia to rest. "War is coming." The words were being whispered through the slave quarters like wind through the rushes. "War's coming, war's coming. Them Yankees are going to free us." "If we don't get killed first." "Pray the Lord we don't get killed first out of spite." "They won't do that, they needs us." "Don't you bet on it, missie, they's as spiteful as adders. They'd kill us for spite." "Not if the Yankees get here first." "War's coming." "When? When?" "Soon, war's coming soon and we'll be free." "Or dead, but that's freedom too." "I'd rather be a slave and alive than free and dead." "Not me, not me. I'd rather be dead than live like this for the rest of my life." "War's coming."

She looked over at the house. Leigh Dickie claimed he was a poor man and had no money for maintenance, but everybody knew he was a gambler and spent everything he could on dice and cards. His marriage was miserable, and Caddie never stopped nagging and complaining. There were times that Lena almost felt pity for him, but she shrugged it off. Nobody had pitied her when calamity befell her. *War's coming, war's coming.*

On impulse she walked toward the house. Everybody was gone to the meeting about the secession and the war and she doubted they would be back for a while. The other slaves were in the cabin. Quickly, she opened the door, slipped inside, and headed for Mrs. Dickie's bedroom.

Everything was tidy, but she could see the dust everywhere. Caddie didn't let her clean because she said bluntly it was a waste of time. Mrs. Dickie wasn't ever coming back.

Lena went over to the dainty painted lady's desk under the window. All clear so far and she could see if anybody was returning. She lifted the lid. Inside were piles of papers, neatly tied with ribbon. A quick look confirmed they were old letters that Mrs. Dickie had kept from the friends of her youth. She pulled open the little drawer at the back of the desk. There were more papers there, a last will and testament, a deed to the house, and a creased document, handwritten, which she recognized as the bill of sale that Prescott had drawn up and given to Mrs. Dickie in exchange for four hundred dollars. She took it out.

Know all by these presents that I, James Prescott, of the County of Guildwood and the State of Maryland have this day delivered to Mrs. Catherine Dickie of the city of Baltimore, a negro slave woman aged seventeen years old, named Lena, for the sum of four hundred dollars and the right and title to said woman I warrant and defend now and forever. I also warrant her to be sound and healthy of meek character although inclined to be fanciful. She can read and write. Signed and dated this twenty-eighth day of August, 1858.

She knew there had been two papers: this bill of sale and the forged right and title that Prescott had also handed over. Frantic now, driven by need but not even acknowledging to herself what she wanted to know, she upended the drawer, spilling the contents onto the floor.

There it was. A piece of paper on the outside of which was written *Original title to slave called Lena*. She grabbed it up and unfolded it.

Know all men by these presents, that I...

The name of the seller was written in the space provided, a neat, legible hand that she recognized at once.

In consideration of the sum of three hundred dollars,
in hand paid by James Prescott to have and to hold, I
deliver the said described negro girl unto the said
James Prescott

A second signature, the witness's, was scrawled at the bottom of the page. She was familiar with that hand as well.

She had to sit down, otherwise she might have fainted. Her temples were throbbing so violently she thought her head would burst open. *War's coming, war's coming.*

CHAPTER TWENTY

Murdoch lit his bicycle lamp and set off back along Wellesley Street. His encounter with the inspector was bemusing. When Murdoch had been accepted into Inspector Stark's newly created department of detectives three years earlier, Brackenreid had made no bones about the fact that he didn't trust Roman Catholics and insisted Murdoch have the lesser position of acting detective. It was only after Murdoch had solved a major case earlier this year that Brackenreid had promoted him to full detective. That's why all his words about trust and respect had rung a false note. Murdoch wondered whether he was being set up as a scapegoat if this so-called cure collapsed. He wouldn't put it past him.

Murdoch thought back to Elijah Green's remark that if you were a negro man living in Toronto, you'd notice another coloured person, however brief the encounter. He'd felt a pang of empathy on hearing that. He'd had similar experiences as a Roman Catholic in this city, which was governed by Protestants who tended to fear and despise other faiths, even those under the banner of Christ. Forget about Jews or the few Chinese residents. They were even more ostracized. None of them could have public office, and there were none at all on the police force. Not that Catholics

were immune from prejudice and self-righteousness. He'd seen vicious diatribes in both the *Orange Banner* and the *Catholic Register*, one against the other.

He wondered if Jesus wept.

He had been picking up speed as he rode along Wilton Street and now he smiled, knowing he was like a lost dog heading for home as fast as it could. He scorched down Ontario Street to his boarding house, which beckoned a welcome with bright lamplight.

He wheeled his bicycle into the hall and Amy immediately came out of the kitchen to greet him with a kiss.

"You taste like wine," said Murdoch.

"We're celebrating."

"Don't tell me the school board has offered you a permanent position?"

She grimaced. "I'll expect that when it snows in July. Come on, we're all in the kitchen. We've been waiting for you." She took him by the hand.

"Just a minute, let me take my things off."

"Only your hat and coat for now." She said it with a mischievous grin, and the implication made Murdoch blush like a shy schoolboy. This relationship was so new, he couldn't help himself. He was always chagrined when he reacted like this, he was almost thirty-five years old, for God's sake. But what his mind wanted and what his body did weren't always compatible.

Amy thrust open the door to the kitchen.

"Here he is at last."

"Hurrah!"

Charlie Seymour was sitting beside Katie Tibbett, the fourth resident of the boarding house. Her twin boys were in high chairs across from them. Somebody had given them each a wooden spoon and a pot to bang on and excited by the liveliness around them they slammed away enthusiastically. Both of them had cream smeared around

their mouths. There was a bottle of wine on the table and the delicious aroma of a meal filled the kitchen. Katie got up to bring Murdoch his dinner, but Amy forestalled her.

“Stay where you are, I’ll get it. Tell him your news.”

Katie glanced at Charlie shyly. “You do it.”

“With pleasure. Will, Katie and me are going to put up the banns. We’ve set a wedding date for May 16.”

“Amy is going to be my maid of honour, and Charlie wants you to be the best man. Will you?” interjected Katie.

“I wouldn’t miss it,” said Murdoch. He thrust out his hand. “Congratulations, Charlie. I can’t say I’m surprised, but I couldn’t be happier for you.”

Both boys yelled and waved their spoons like conductor’s batons. Amy laced her fingers together and blew through her thumbs, making a shrill whistle.

“I don’t know why she’s said yes to an old codger like me,” said Charlie, “but I’m not going to talk her out of it.”

Katie gave him a kiss on the cheek. “Don’t you dare say you’re an old codger. You’re the dearest, kindest man I’ve ever known.”

Charlie groaned. “You’d say that to your granddad.”

“Tell him he’s a grumpy beast and all you want is his money,” said Murdoch. “That’ll make him happy.”

“I couldn’t do that, it’s not true.”

Katie was still an innocent and didn’t always understand teasing.

Amy started to whistle a lively rendition of “For He’s a Jolly Good Fellow,” and Katie and Murdoch sang lustily to Seymour, who hung his head bashfully. When they’d finished, Charlie solicited another kiss from his betrothed, which was gladly bestowed.

Then Katie looked at Murdoch in dismay. “What are we thinking? You haven’t had your supper yet.” She bustled over to the oven, took out a plate of food, and put it on the table.

"It's your favourite, baked ham and cabbage with roasted potatoes."

"Let me pour you some wine," said Charlie.

Murdoch tucked into the dinner. "What are you going to do after you're married? Please tell me you're not going to leave."

"Seeing you stuff your face like that, Will, I would suspect you have designs on my fiancée," said Seymour. "But we have talked it over and we intend to stay here for at least a year so we can save money for our own house. Amy has kindly agreed to switch rooms with me so we'll put the twins in the middle room and Katie and I will have the parlour."

Murdoch liked that idea. It meant Amy and he would have more privacy. He glanced over at her and saw she had read his mind. She smiled at him.

"More wine, everybody?" Charlie reached for the bottle.

"Not for me," said Amy. "One is enough. I can't go to Councillor Blong's house smelling of drink."

"Are you going out tonight?" asked Murdoch in dismay.

"I have to. Mary Blong hasn't been in school for almost three weeks. I received a note today asking if I would visit her and bring her up to date with her lessons."

"What's wrong with her?" asked Katie.

"I don't know. He didn't say, but one of her friends whispered in my ear that Mary is having fits and the doctor is lost. I think she meant at a loss. My belief is that Mary would recover quickly if her new little brother disappeared."

"Oh, Amy, don't say that."

"Sorry, Katie, but it's true. Mary, poor thing, is consumed by jealousy over the newcomer, a longed-for boy, and I think this is her way of getting attention. But we'll see."

"There's a fresh junket in the pantry," said Katie. "Why don't you take some of it? That's sure to put you into the councillor's good graces."

“Thank you, Katie, but I refuse to curry favour just because he’s a member of the school board.” She smiled ruefully. “Besides, Mary doesn’t like me much at all, and I wouldn’t trust her not to spit it out in disgust just to make a point.”

“Nobody would turn down Katie’s junket once tasted,” said Murdoch. “I’ll have Mary’s portion, though, if you think taking it is a waste of time. I can see the boys have already enjoyed their share.”

Seymour raised his glass. “A toast to James and Jacob, also jolly good fellows.”

He was a little tipsy because he was not a drinking man, but the wine and his obvious happiness had softened his usually austere features and took years off his age. Katie’s first husband had been a scoundrel, and Murdoch was glad she had now found a man who so obviously would treat her well.

Murdoch clinked glasses. “To the lads. And lucky fellows they are.”

Amy stood up. “I’ll be off then.”

“It’s getting rather late,” said Murdoch. “Why don’t I come with you?”

“That’s really not necessary, Will. They live over on Sackville Street not far from the school. It won’t take me long to get there. I’m sure you’ve had an arduous day.”

Murdoch felt a brief flash of frustration. This was not the first time they’d had a minor clash like this. “Amy! You’re the one who looks tired. A little fresh air will do me good.”

She hesitated. “Very well. At least we can give the lovebirds a little time to themselves.”

Murdoch picked up his plate.

“Leave it, Will. I’ll clean up,” said Katie. “You should get going.”

James bonged his spoon on the upturned pot in agreement.

Once outside, Murdoch and Amy walked in silence. He was damned if he was going to relent, but they hadn't gone far when he felt her slip her arm through his.

"I'm sorry to be so pig-headed, Will. It's just that I can't bear to be treated as if I were fragile or incapable."

"You think I'm not aware of that by now? Didn't it occur to you that I wanted your company?"

"I'm sorry, sir. I'll never do it again," she said meekly.

"Ha. I'll believe that when it snows in July."

They crossed over the street and he suddenly grabbed her round the waist and swung her over his hip to lift her up and over some horse dung that she had been about to tread in. He set her down on the sidewalk.

"See, you do need me. What would Councillor Blong think if you showed up smelling of wine and your skirt and boots covered in manure?"

She lifted her head. "I don't still smell of wine, do I?"

"To properly determine that I will have to come very close to your mouth and if I do that I will have to kiss you, and seeing that we are being approached by a respectable middle-aged couple, I had better not."

Amy stepped away from him. "No, you certainly had better not. They might recognize me and report me to the board for conduct unbecoming to a schoolteacher."

The couple passed them and the man raised his hat.

"Good evening, Miss Slade."

"Good evening, Mr. Hall."

Murdoch waited until they were out of earshot. "It's bad luck that he was somebody you knew. Not that we were doing anything."

She slipped her arm through his again. "Let's put it this way, that was Mr. Hall all right, but that wasn't Mrs. Hall. The woman clinging to his arm was a rather attractive woman, don't you think?"

"Very. And most stylishly dressed."

"She could be his sister, of course."

"Of course. And it meant nothing that he was in a hurry to go past us and seemed most disconcerted to see you."

Amy laughed. "Your policeman's eye, Will. But my heart did skip a beat when I realized we knew each other."

"Good heavens, I thought you were a New Woman."

"That's got nothing to do with it. I don't want to lose my position."

He almost burst out that she wouldn't get the shoot if she were a respectable married woman kissing her husband, even on the street, but he didn't want to spoil the mood again. Besides, she would have to leave teaching if she were married, and he knew that was one of the reasons she wouldn't agree to do it. In his blue moments, he wondered if the real reason was that she didn't love him enough but when she lay in his arms in bed, he believed her when she said she had never cared for anybody the way she cared for him. He sighed. Patience, patience.

"What's the matter?" Amy asked.

"Nothing."

The rest of the way to the Blong house he filled her in on what had been happening in the course of his investigation. She listened intently, as she always did.

"How cruel to whip a man in that way. No matter what he's done, nothing can excuse it. This feels like a bad case, Will. Be careful."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

SEPTEMBER 1862

The late-afternoon sun had turned the river red and there was a sharp nip in the air. Summer was almost done. They had been on the move for two weeks, travelling mostly at night and both of them were exhausted. A few apples they'd picked had been the only thing to sustain them for three days, wormy and sour as they were. Lena stopped on the crest of the hill.

"Look, Fiddie, there's a farmhouse down there. Maybe we can find something to eat."

"And maybe we'll get taken. I'd rather stay hungry. We'd better scout it out first."

"But we must be in Union territory by now. They won't turn us in."

"They sure enough will if they think there's a reward. Come on, crouch down here, it's out of the wind a bit and we can watch."

Lena huddled close to Fidelia and they sat until the sun disappeared behind the horizon. They saw a wink of light from the farmhouse as somebody lit a lamp.

"Let's get closer. See who's at home," said Lena.

Cautiously, they slithered down the hill, keeping to the shrubs that dotted the slope until they were within a

hundred feet of the house. The windows were uncurtained and they could see clearly into the front room, which from the look of it was the only room in the house. They could see a kitchen range, a table, and steep stairs leading to the upper floor. A grey-haired woman sat sewing by a fire that burned low. She was dressed in black.

"I think she's alone," said Fidelia.

"Let's wait a bit longer to make sure."

A cow started to bellow from the shed that adjoined the house, and the woman got up stiffly, put down her sewing, and walked over to the door. Shortly afterwards she came out with a shawl around her head and shuffled across the muddy yard to the shed. The cow was louder than ever.

"That critter's gonna bust if that old woman don't get there soon," said Fidelia.

They waited, but nobody else came out of the house, no new lights appeared in the upper window. The cow had quieted down.

Suddenly, the piercing bray of a mule came from the shed. Fidelia nudged Lena.

"The Lord done sent us a gift. Come on."

They stood up and walked across the yard toward the out-house just as the woman emerged carrying a pail of milk. She stopped when she saw the two of them.

"Vot you want?"

She had a thick, guttural accent and she looked afraid.

"We're in need of food and shelter, ma'am," said Lena politely. "I wonder if you'd be so good as to let us have some of your fresh milk and a place to bed down for the night? We can work for it."

The woman shook her head. "Nein. I sell this milk. You go away. No niggers here."

Close up she wasn't as old as she had first appeared, but her face was careworn and weathered.

She continued to walk past them to the house, but before she had gone more than a few steps, Fidelia grabbed

a spade that was leaning against the wall and brought it down as hard as she could on the back of the woman's head. She dropped to the ground, blood leaking through her grey hair. The pail fell and tipped on its side, but Lena was there in an instant and righted it, saving most of the milk. The woman was convulsing and twitching, but Fidelia hit her again and she was still.

"It was her or us," she said.

Lena stared down at the body for a few moments. "Let's go into the house, I'm freezing."

"Shall we bury her first?"

"Later. We should make absolutely sure she is alone. Bring the spade just in case. I'll carry the milk pail."

They went inside. The room was plainly furnished, the plank floor well scuffed and worn, but the woman had been able to maintain herself somehow, and to their starved eyes the place was cozy and inviting, especially the sight of a half a loaf of bread on the table and the smell of something cooking on the well-blackened stove.

"Jesus, hallelujah," whispered Fidelia.

Lena nodded. "Amen to that." She went to the tall cabinet that was by the stove and quickly opened some of the drawers. She removed a long bread knife and handed it to Fidelia.

"Run upstairs and have a look in the bedroom. Leave the spade with me."

Fidelia did so, climbing the stairs, the knife behind her back. A few minutes later, she called down.

"Not a soul. That old ugly white biddy lives alone, all right."

At that, Lena tore a chunk of bread from the loaf and stuffed it in her mouth. She lifted the lid from the steaming pot and flinched at the heat of the handle. She grabbed two bowls from the shelf and started to ladle the soup into each one.

"Fiddie, come on down now, we can eat." She heard a thump from up above. "What are you doing?"

"Just goin' exploring. Hey!" Fidelia yelled out with excitement and the next thing she was hurtling down the stairs, almost falling.

"Lena, look what I done found under her mattress." She was holding a fistful of paper money. "Is it Confederate money?"

"No, Yankee."

"Quick, count it."

Lena took the notes. "It's mostly ones and twos, probably her milk money. Oh, Fiddie, there's almost a hundred dollars here."

"She most likely got more hidden somewhere about, we should search."

"Not right now. We've got to eat or I shall faint. Put the money on the table where we can look at it."

Lena went to the window and pulled the heavy woollen curtains closed.

"We don't want anybody looking in."

"We didn't pass no farmhouse since yesterday. We're all right."

They didn't speak until the soup was devoured and Fidelia filled their bowls again. She was shovelling up the thick stew into her mouth when Lena rapped her hard on the hand with her spoon.

"Don't gulp your food. Where are your manners?"

"I lost them long time 'go," said Fiddie with a scowl.

"Well you've got to acquire some. You're not an ignorant nigger gal now."

"I knows that."

"And you've got to start talking properly. You must say, I *know* that. And it's incorrect to say, 'The Lord done sent us,' it should be 'The Lord has sent -'"

"What you doing, missus?"

"I'm trying to teach you. These things are important, Fiddie. When we're in New York, you might as well wave a Cessie flag saying 'ex-slave, ex-slave' when you talk like that."

"Why you raging on me, missus high and mighty?"

"I'm not raging on you, I'm -"

"Yes, you are. I know you. You're roaring at me, ain't you, for hitting that old woman?"

"I might have been able to talk her into helping us."

"Not her. You heard her. She don't have no time for niggers."

Lena shuddered.

"What's the matter?" asked Fidelia.

"Nothing, I'm just cold that's all. Let's light all the lamps and stoke up the fire."

"Not before you 'pologize to me. I saved us."

There was a long silence. Lena stared down at the table, then her body sagged and she reached out her hand. "You're right, Fiddie. Please forgive me. It's just that..."

"I know what you're thinking. You're saying to yourself that this old white woman is all soft and helpless, but she weren't. She'd have shot us soon as blink if she had a chance."

"You're right again, Fiddie." Another pause while Fidelia wiped her bowl clean with the last crust of bread.

"While we're talking bout 'pologies and 'you're rights' are flying round the table, I'll give you one back. From now on you can correct me all you want. I'm not gonna be a nigger gal any more."

Lena leaned forward and kissed her. "My angel, my dove. Your price is above rubies."

Fiddie gave her a slap on the arm. "That so? I hope you ain't thinking of selling me."

Lena touched the girl's cheek. "Not God Himself, nor the Archangel Gabriel, not all the company of heaven could tempt me."

"You and your poetry," repeated Fidelia. "Now come on, I'se full of beans now. Let's you and me give this place the spring cleaning of its life and see what we can find."

They searched for two more hours and discovered another forty dollars in coins hidden in an old cigar box in the kitchen cabinet. Fidelia made up a bundle of things they could use or perhaps sell later when they got to New York. There were a few good pieces of silver cutlery, a man's steel watch; several picture frames. One of them contained the photograph of a young man in a Confederate uniform.

"See, what I tell you?" said Fiddie. "She wouldn't have helped no nigger women."

She removed the photograph from the frame, tore it up, and threw it on the fire.

"It's almost midnight, Fiddie," said Lena. "We've got to stop. We can't take the entire household with us."

"We'll take much as we can carry. You'll see. It'll be worth it."

She had been going through the wardrobe in the corner of the room and she took out a navy blue worsted suit. She sniffed at it.

"Smells like tobacco. Must have belonged to her old massa man." She slipped on the jacket. "Looka this, Lena honey chile. It fits me snug as a bug in massa's ass. See, there's boots as well." She thrust her bare feet into the boots that were at the back of the wardrobe. "They's perfect." She beamed at Lena. "You know what I think, missus? I think Miss Fidelia and Miss Lena, slaves in the possession of Mr. Leigh Dickie and his wife, may she rot in hell, Missus Caddie, have now died and here we have two new folks. One a respectable widow lady and the other her faithful boy, Solomon."

"Solomon? Why Solomon?"

"He was very wise, wasn't he? And ain't I very wise too?"

Lena chuckled. "You most certainly are. You're going to have to bind your little rosebuds down though, if you want to be convincing."

"Missus Caddie told me just last month I was as flat as an ironing table and as ugly as spoiled porridge."

"She was wrong on both counts. You're sprouting every day and you're as pretty as any coloured gal I ever saw."

Fidelia touched her own breasts tentatively. "Good thing we got out of there then."

Lena turned away. "I've changed my mind, Fiddie. I don't care if it is late, I'm going to have a bath."

"What for? You're only gonna get dirty again."

"Never mind about that. Look, she's got a tin tub. I'm going to boil up some water and sit in that old tin tub till I wrinkle up. You can go to bed if you like."

"No. I'll stay. You'll probably need somebody to wash your back for you."

After Lena's bath, they decided it would be warmer and safer to sleep downstairs, so they hauled the mattress off the bed and brought it down in front of the fire. The old lady had more than one nightgown, and Fiddie insisted Lena take the cleaner of the two.

"We can burn our clothes," said Lena. "I never want to see them again. I'll take hers, they're decent enough."

"What name you gonna take as your new self?" Fidelia asked.

"I don't know yet, I'll have to think about it." She pulled the girl closer. "It's cold, snuggle up. I don't think I've stopped shivering yet."

Fidelia rolled over so she was facing Lena. "I've been a thinking, the best thing to do is to set the house on fire. We can bring the old woman's body in here. When the neighbours find her, they'll think she just gone and knocked over a lamp or something like that. They might not even

know 'bout her money and if they did they'll think it burned in the fire. We can get ourselves a good start that way."

"Surely, they'll notice if the mule is missing?"

"He could just have escaped."

"But what about the cow? It would be suspicious with the cow gone as well. Cows don't ever wander far."

"If we leave her, she'll holler if she ain't milked and that could bring the neighbours over too soon. We'll have to kill her."

"We could take her with us. We won't be travelling that fast and it means we could have fresh milk."

"No, she'll slow us down."

Lena sighed. "If we leave her in the shed, it most likely catch fire and she'll be burned alive."

"If it bothers you that much, I'll cut her throat first."

"If you say so, Solomon."

At daybreak they were up. Silently, they carried the corpse of the old woman, now stiffened in death, into the house. Lena made a pile of their old clothes, then splashed lamp oil on the furniture and the floor while Fiddie packed the mule's panniers. She milked the cow and added the pannikin of fresh milk to the mule's burden. Then as Lena started to throw lit matches onto the oil-soaked carpet, Fidelia released the cow to a merciful death.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Amy had found her visit with Mary Blong unsettling. The girl had had some sort of fit in her presence, but Amy thought she was acting.

"Her mother is forced to wait on her hand and foot, to the detriment apparently of the little brother, who is also clearly the apple of his father's eye," she told Murdoch. There was a sharp note in her voice. Amy was, Murdoch knew, the only girl in a family of boys.

"I tell you what, I'll have a word with Professor Broske. He might be able to give some advice, even see the girl if need be. I'm sure he'd be more than happy to do so, and it will enhance your value in the councillor's eyes...No, I'm only joking."

"I'm not offended. What sort of tight-laced spinster do you take me for? I'd polish Mr. Blong's shoes and anything else, if that would get me a permanent position."

Murdoch had made a sound of disbelief.

Later, he invited her to share his bed, but she declined, pleading fatigue. She left with a deep kiss and a whispered promise and he went to bed alone but content.

The following morning, he slept late again and had to get moving in a hurry. He washed and shaved as fast as he could, swallowed a cup of cold tea left over from the night

before, and jumped on his bicycle. He decided to drop off the vial of medicine that Brackenreid had given him at Dr. Ogden's house before going to the station and to ask her how he could get in touch with Professor Broske. It was a glorious spring morning, with clouds like dandelion fluff, scattered across a robin's egg blue sky, and he happily took a shortcut through the Horticultural Gardens. Buds had burst out on the trees and shrubs overnight, and flocks of starlings were twittering shrilly in the branches. He would have broken out into song himself if he hadn't feared to upset passersby, so he hummed loudly instead, until he realized he had unconsciously been singing "Ave Maria," which seemed incongruously ecclesiastical for his decidedly carnal feeling of well-being.

When he arrived at Dr. Ogden's house near the corner of Gerrard and Parliament Streets, a prim, elderly maid told him he was too late and that Dr. Ogden had already left.

"Friday is her surgery morning," she said in a disapproving tone, as if he should know that.

"Ah, yes. Did Professor Broske call for her, by any chance?"

"He did." More disapproval, but Murdoch thought it was for a different reason.

He'd packed the vial in a box with an explanatory note and he handed it to the maid. "Will you ask Dr. Ogden to telephone me at the station as soon as she can?"

The maid dropped a perfunctory curtsy. "Very well, sir. But I don't know when she will return home."

He tipped his hat and left. He hoped the good doctor and professor weren't going to go sightseeing after she'd dealt with her patients. He was curious to know what Broske would say about Mary Blong.

He bicycled back to the station, stopping briefly at a baker's shop to buy half a dozen macaroons, two of which he crammed into his mouth almost before he left the shop.

Gardiner was on duty again.

"Good afternoon, er I mean, morning, Murdoch. Your clock still isn't working properly, I see."

Murdoch grinned back at him. "Yes, it is. I had to bike up to see Dr. Ogden, which is why I am ten minutes past the hour."

"Constable Fyfer is waiting for you in the duty room. He says he's got some news regarding that case you're working on."

"Good."

"I warned him to make sure the tea was fresh," Gardiner called after him.

Murdoch tossed his hat on the hook by the door and went into the duty room, where Fyfer was filling a tea pot with boiling water.

"Good morning, sir. Lovely day, isn't it?"

"It is indeed, Fyfer, it is indeed."

He dropped the bag of macaroons on the table. "Pour me a mug of tea, there's a good lad, and you can have one of these."

The young constable did as he asked and handed a steaming mug to Murdoch.

"The sergeant says you have some news for me."

"Yes, sir." Fyfer took his notebook out of his chest pocket and flipped the pages. He glanced at Murdoch, his eyes shining with excitement. "I have found a witness, a reliable one, I swear. His name is James Whatling and he is a coachman to a Dr. Maguire who lives on Mutual Street right at the corner of Shuter Street. You know where those private grounds are on the west side?"

"Yes. A nobby place. What's he have to say for himself?"

"When Constable Crabtree and I were going door to door on Thursday, both the doctor and Whatling were out of town. He'd taken him to Markham early that morning and got back late last night, which is why I only just got his statement. I made a point of going around before I came to work this morning."

"Please read it, Fyfer, I can hardly contain myself."

"Yes, sir, sorry, I didn't want you to wonder why I didn't give this to you earlier. Anyway, here's what the man had to say for himself. I took it down verbatim." He took up a somewhat formal pose, the notebook held in front of him like a hymn book.

"He said the following. 'I had driven Dr. Maguire, my employer for the past twelve years, to a concert at the new Massey Music Hall, which was to start at eight o'clock. The weather was inclement so rather than wait for him as I might ordinarily do, he gave permission for me to return home and he would take a public cab at the conclusion of the concert or stay at his club, which is within easy walking distance. The doctor is a bachelor so would not disappoint anyone who might be waiting up for him -'"

"My God, Fyfer, the man is long-winded. Can you get to the point?"

"Yes, sir, I'm almost there. 'I came home via my usual route at quite a fast pace because it was raining heavily and neither the horse nor I wanted to be out longer than need be' - it's coming, Mr. Murdoch, I promise. 'As I traversed in a southerly direction down Mutual Street, I crossed over the intersection at Wilton Avenue which meant I was passing the Cooke Livery stable where I now know Mr. Daniel Cooke was the victim of a savage attack -'"

"Is that how we referred to it, 'a savage attack'?"

"That didn't come from me, sir. I merely said that Mr. Cooke had been found dead under suspicious circumstances. I believe it was one or two of the newspapers that called it 'a savage attack.'"

"All right, go on."

"'As I went past the stables, I saw a woman standing underneath a tree close to the fence that surrounds the livery. She turned on her heel on seeing me coming and walked away in the direction of Wilton Street...' That's not the exciting bit, sir. It's coming. 'Shortly afterwards, I saw a

man walking very quickly, almost running, in fact, also going in a northerly direction, that is to say in the direction of the stables. I continued on my way, not paying too much attention -”

“Sounds like he was paying a lot of attention, but never mind, continue.”

“‘I was about to turn into the gates of Dr. Maguire’s estate, with some relief I must admit, when I saw yet another person also hurrying toward the stables. This man I recognized. It was Daniel Cooke himself.’”

Fyfer stopped reading.

“Is that all?”

“No, sir. Sorry, Mr. Murdoch, I couldn’t help but save the best to last. I asked Mr. Whatling if he could give me a description of the two people he had seen on the street before he saw Mr. Cooke. Here’s what he said. ‘I had the merest glimpse of the woman, who I am certain was trying to avoid detection but she was dressed in dark clothing, perhaps a mackintosh. She was of an average height. She had a black large umbrella -”

“Oh very useful, Fyfer. No sense as to age or anything that would distinguish the poor woman from a half the female population of the city?”

“No, sir. But this is what he had to say about the second fellow, the one he thought was hurrying toward the stables.”

“It was pouring with rain, who wouldn’t hurry?”

“I know, sir, but I pressed him on this question. Obviously Cooke was rushing to his unknown rendezvous from his own house. The times fit perfectly if we give Whatling five minutes or so to get from Massey Hall. Did you get a good look at the man ahead of Cooke? I asks him and he says, ‘Yes, I did. He wasn’t carrying an umbrella. He was of medium height and of a stocky build. There is a lamp on that side of the street and as he went past his face was clearly visible in the light. There is no doubt in my mind, he

was a coloured man, not young but with a hard cruel look to him as if he had lived a life of depravity.”

“That does sound like our messenger fellow, although the life of depravity didn’t impress itself on Ferguson. So we have confirmed that Mr. Cooke was running to a rendezvous set up by this mysterious darkie. It’s impossible to say if the woman in the mackintosh was involved, but for the moment let’s assume she was and she was waiting for them to arrive. As I’ve said, I think the attack required two people.”

“But a woman to do something so cruel, sir? It’s hard to believe.”

“It is, indeed, constable, but we can’t let our bias cloud our mind. The fair sex is just as capable of crime as we are. I’d like you to continue making your inquiries. Go farther afield. I want everybody in the vicinity questioned.”

“Could we be dealing with a mad man, sir? I could telephone the lunatic asylum and see if they’ve had any elopements.”

Murdoch clicked his tongue. “I can’t see our fellow being insane. There’s evidence of careful planning here. Besides if there were two of them, it’s hard to imagine *two* mad men working well together. But there’s no harm in following up on that. Give the matron my regards.”

“Yes, sir. And Constable Crabtree and I have been making progress with the tradesmen. They are to a man angry with Mr. Cooke about his failure to pay and were wondering if, now he’s dead, they will be properly reimbursed.”

“I wouldn’t count on it, not from what I’ve seen of his widow. I presume all their alibis check out?”

“So far they do, sir, but we still have three more to talk to. Cardington, the roofer, Kirkpatrick, the harness man, and McArthur, who delivers the wood.”

“Go and do that right away then. I’ll speak to Whatling. You’ve done a good job, Fyfer, but a second interview is often even more productive.”

“Yes sir, of course.” But Murdoch knew the young constable considered he had done all that could be done. He’d learn. Police work wasn’t like that.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Given how garrulous he was, Murdoch had expected Whatling to be an older man, but he wasn't, probably barely thirty. He was in his shirt sleeves out in the yard of the coach house, polishing the carriage. He didn't look pleased at being interrupted. Murdoch introduced himself.

"I don't know what more I can add to what I already told your constable," said Whatling.

"That was most helpful, but there were a couple of things I'd like to clarify."

"Such as?"

"First off, I'd like to confirm the time when you saw the woman by the stable and the coloured man and Mr. Cooke. You had taken your employer to Massey Hall, I understand, and that would have been for an eight-o'clock concert, I presume."

Whatling continued his work, shaking out the cushions from inside the carriage.

"That's right. He's a very punctual man, is Dr. Maguire. Can't stand to be late, so whenever I take him anywhere I make sure to leave in plenty of time, to allow for unexpected delays. You can't be too careful in this job, the horse might throw a shoe, for instance, then what do you do

if you've only allowed yourself a few minutes to get there before the curtain rises?"

He slapped at the cushions with a carpet beater, and Murdoch took advantage of the short break in his speech.

"So what time would you say you were crossing Wilton on your way back?"

"Well now, I let off the doctor at ten minutes before eight, a little later than I would have wanted but there were a lot of carriages arriving at the same time and we had to wait in line to get to the entrance. I couldn't let him off sooner because of the rain...so I'd say it took me only five or six minutes from the concert hall to home, which means I would have been there shortly before eight o'clock."

Murdoch was beginning to dread asking another question, but he pressed on.

"You said that you saw a woman standing underneath the tree across from the livery and she was trying to avoid being identified."

"That's right. That's what I told the constable. She -"

"It was an inhospitable night. Could she have just been in a hurry to get out of the rain?"

Whatling looked triumphant. "When I first noticed her, she was standing, distinctly standing, and waiting under that tree on the corner. She didn't move until she heard the sound of my carriage, then she scooted away up Mutual Street, and in my humble opinion, she deliberately bent her umbrella in my direction so I couldn't see her."

"Was she a white woman?"

"To be honest, I didn't see her face clearly. She was as well dressed as any white woman in a long, dark mackintosh, but, no, the gospel truth is I didn't really see her face."

"How close behind her was the man?"

"He was at the bottom of the road as if he'd just turned onto Mutual Street from Shuter."

"You described him as a coloured man, not young, and with a look of depravity. Can you tell me what constitutes that sort of look, in your opinion?"

Whatling frowned. "Not just my opinion. I've seen pictures of criminals and they had the same sort of expression. His face was all squeezed together like this." He demonstrated, but Murdoch thought he looked as if he had tasted something unpleasant, got some dirt in his eyes, or was straining on a commode. Depravity was not the first thing that came to mind.

"One thing that did intrigue me, Mr. Whatling, was that you got such a good look at the man. Was he not wearing a hat?"

"Yes, he was, a black fedora, as I recall, but as I drove past he looked up at me, fearful like, and as we were right by the street-lamp I saw him very clearly. Remember, I'm up in my seat so I'm looking down at him. I thought to myself, I thought, You are a thoroughly bad character as ever I saw one and I'm going to make good and sure all the doors are properly locked tonight."

"I see. You said he was of medium height and rather stocky."

"That's right. He was taller than me, who is medium height, you might say, and probably not as tall as you, who would be considered a tallish man."

He replaced the cushions in the carriage, then breathed on the side lamp of the carriage and polished it with a clean cloth.

"And Mr. Cooke, who you said was quite close behind this coloured man, did he catch up with him at any point?"

"Not that I saw, but I was turning into the driveway by then so they were out of my view. But I thought it odd that Mr. Cooke didn't call out a good night to me. He's familiar with the carriage. He just looked like he was a man in fear for his life and he wouldn't have noticed if the Prince himself in his royal coach was going down Mutual Street."

Murdoch sighed. "Can you tell me why you assumed Mr. Cooke was a man in fear of his life?"

Whatling hunched his shoulders, tucked his chin into his collar, and trotted a few paces around the yard. "He was walking like this."

This demonstration was slightly more convincing than the previous one but could as easily have been depicting a man who was facing into a heavy rain and getting soaked.

"Was he also wearing a hat?"

"No, which I thought was odd as it was pouring, but he wasn't in his right state of mind, if you ask me. Besides, we know Mr. Cooke was going to meet his death, don't we?" added Whatling.

We do now, thought Murdoch, but you didn't know it then. It was unfortunate that Fyfer hadn't got to the coachman before he'd heard any details about what had happened in the livery. He wondered how much Whatling had embroidered, not maliciously, but like so many witnesses, convinced after the fact about details they didn't think of at the time. There wasn't much else to be got from him, although the man looked as if he could go on talking ad infinitum. Perhaps being a coachman to a bachelor was a lonely job.

"Are you married, Mr. Whatling?"

"No, still hopeful. Why do you ask?"

"No reason, just getting all our facts straight. Are you acquainted with the Cooke household by any chance?"

"On occasion I drop in on my day off and have a chin with the butler, Ferguson. He's from over the pond and my father was from there too, so we like to share stories, as it were."

"And you have seen him since Mr. Cooke's death, I presume?"

"Yes, I saw him when I went over to the house to give my condolences to madam." Whatling was starting to look restive under all the questions. He wrung out his cloth in the

pail of water and pointedly started to wipe down the wheels. Murdoch wasn't finished with him yet.

"How did you hear about Mr. Cooke's death?"

"Mr. Ferguson came by to tell me the news on Thursday night. He was dreadfully upset, poor fellow. He felt quite responsible because he was the one who had taken Mr. Cooke the message from the negro who came to the door. But I told him it was hardly his fault, was it? How was he to know the man was a murderer?"

"Quite so. We don't even know if that was the case ourselves."

Whatling gaped at him in genuine astonishment. "Who else would it be? When I realized I had seen the very man myself heading for the stables, we knew he was the one. The woman was probably in cahoots with him or was set to keep a lookout."

"Did Mr. Ferguson have any theories as to why somebody would attack Mr. Cooke or what the message was that drew him away so urgently?"

Whatling rubbed hard at a muddy splotch. "You probably should talk to him yourself." He paused and looked at Murdoch slyly. "I must say, he did tell me, in confidence of course, that Mr. Cooke had dealings with a fast crowd. This wasn't the first time Ferguson had taken messages."

"Really? Did he say what the others were?"

"No, he didn't, but he suspects they were from local touts. Mr. Cooke had a taste for gambling."

"Horses?"

"Horses and other things. Whatever sport was up, apparently. Lacrosse, boxing, skulling." Whatling gave Murdoch another look. "He even made some bets on the police games last summer, which of course he shouldn't have." He shook his head. "Poor man wasn't very successful, according to Mr. Ferguson. It caused, er" - he coughed delicately - "it caused, shall we say, some

disagreements with Mrs. Cooke, who was dead against it. As are most of the ladies.”

He pulled a handsome silver watch from his waistcoat pocket and consulted it. “I’m sorry, sir, but I must get on with my business. Dr. Maguire is going out to dine this evening. Is that all you need to ask me?”

Murdoch hadn’t noticed the coachman being appreciably slowed down in his work, but he thought he’d got as much as he could at the moment.

“Thank you, Mr. Whatling, you have been very helpful. I may have other questions at a later date, and one of the constables will subpoena you to testify at the inquest. That should take place in a few days. We will let you know.”

“Testify? Oh dear, I’m not sure the doctor will like that. He has his reputation to consider.”

Murdoch was irritated. “First of all, it’s the law. You have no choice. And, secondly, I don’t see that you presenting your evidence honestly to the coroner will in any way reflect on your employer. Quite the opposite. You will be respected and admired for your acute observations.”

Whatling looked doubtful. “You say that, sir, but you’re not a coachman. People don’t want their servants to be the centre of attention, do they? Especially not when murder is involved.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

From Whatling, Murdoch went directly to Cooke's house. Ferguson opened the door to him and flinched back when he saw who it was.

"Mrs. Cooke is not at home. She has gone to the stables to conduct affairs."

"It's actually you I'd like to talk to, Mr. Ferguson."

"Oh dear. Perhaps you could step inside then."

Murdoch did so and the butler closed the door quickly behind him.

"People do like to gossip, don't they?" said Ferguson. They stood awkwardly in the hall. "How may I help with your inquiries, sir?"

Murdoch could see the man trying to pull the formality of his position around him like a tattered cloak.

"I just wanted to go over your statement again. If you don't mind, I'll sit here on the bench." Murdoch sat down and took out his notebook. "You said that the person who brought the message to Mr. Cooke on the night he died was a coloured man?"

"Yes, sir. That's right."

"You described him as young?"

Ferguson pursed his lips. "It was dark and it's a little hard to say with coloureds. Perhaps it would be more

accurate to say of middle age or more."

"What sort of build? Skinny? Fat?"

"Definitely not fat. I'd say, rather on the stocky side."

"And this was no one you recognized?"

"No."

"You have met Elijah Green and Thomas Talbert, the men who work at the stables, I presume?"

"Yes, on one or two occasions I believe both of them have come here to see Mr. Cooke about some matter of other."

"And you're sure it was neither man who brought the message that night?"

Ferguson pondered. "As sure as one can be about these matters. As I have said, it was quite dark in the porch and our interaction was very brief."

"The message was in an envelope, was it not?"

"Yes, sir."

"We have been unable as yet to find either the contents or this envelope. Did Mr. Cooke leave it here by chance?"

"I believe not. Lucy would have found it and handed it to me. Besides, I waited in the dining-room pantry to see if there would be a reply and I saw Mr. Cooke placing the letter back in the envelope and putting it in his inner pocket."

"Was there anything else that you noticed that might have come back to you on further reflection?"

"As a matter of fact, there was something. Mrs. Cooke spoke to Mr. Cooke quite sharply that he was going out so abruptly without finishing his supper, but he just said something like, 'I've got to go to the stables, I won't be long.'"

This was new information, and again Murdoch wondered how much Ferguson's recollections were being influenced by Whatling's and vice versa.

"It was raining heavily at that time. Did Mr. Cooke take a mackintosh with him or his hat, or even an umbrella?"

“He didn’t take anything. I was about to hand him the umbrella, but he had gone out of the door before I had the opportunity.”

Murdoch decided to get to the point. “I’ve heard that he liked to gamble. Did you know that?”

“My employers affairs are none of my business, sir.”

“Of course, but that’s not what I asked you, I merely wondered if you knew about his habits. Your friend, Mr. Whatling, seems quite aware of them.”

Ferguson flushed. “As I said earlier, people do like to gossip.”

“Was that a yes or a no answer?”

“In my position, one cannot fail to pay attention to visitors, and I must admit that I have seen some unsavoury men coming to the door.”

“A yes, then?”

Ferguson nodded. Murdoch wanted to shake it out of him, but he also knew that he was afraid for his job. If it got back to Mrs. Cooke that he had been telling tales, she might dismiss him at once and with no references. He was at an age where finding other work would be difficult.

“Thank you Mr. Ferguson. You have been most helpful.”

“Shall I tell Mrs. Cooke that you called?”

“I’m actually going to the stables now to see if I can find her.”

Ferguson let him out with the same furtive movements as before, and Murdoch got on his bicycle and headed for the livery. Mrs. Cooke was in the office, seated at the desk. She was dressed in mourning black but had tossed back her crepe veil. One of the cabbies, a lanky, rough-haired fellow, was standing in front of her, looking like a defiant schoolboy. Murdoch knocked on the window and when she saw who it was, she waved to him to come in.

“It wasn’t me, missus, I swear,” the man was saying angrily. “I’ve got a wife and five children, I’m not going to be cavorting all over the country in the middle of the night.”

Mrs. Cooke greeted Murdoch. "You've come at a good time, Mr. Murdoch. One of my employees is a cheat and a liar, and I am just trying to determine which one it is." She wagged her finger at the cabbie. "This man is a detective. He'll be able to tell if you're lying or not."

The cabbie justifiably glared at Murdoch.

"I might be of more use if you tell me what this is all about, Mrs. Cooke," said Murdoch.

"I have discovered that one of my cab drivers is returning to the stables in the middle of the night and stealing one of the horse-and-carriages. I am trying to determine who is the culprit."

"Begging your pardon, ma'am," said the cabbie, "but how do you know it was one of us as did that? For that matter, how do you know the horse has been taken out?"

"Because, Mr. Wallace, when I came in early this morning, I discovered the carriage you had hired was quite filthy. Simply covered in mud. As for the horse you usually take out, it seemed quite worn out as well."

"That horse is ready for the knackers. I can't get any work out of him. In fact, if you check the sheet you'll see I signed off early, which is what I had to do as he wouldn't go no faster than a turtle no matter how I whipped him. As for the carriage being dirty, speak to Elijah Green. Perhaps he didn't do his job last night."

"I did. He says all of the carriages were cleaned before he went home. I am of the mind to believe him."

Wallace shrugged. "Well, I tell you it weren't me. You can ask my missus if you don't believe me."

Mrs. Cooke's expression showed clearly what she thought of that, but she made no comment.

"Have you spoken to all the cabbies?" Murdoch asked.

"Yes, I have, and they all deny any knowledge."

"Did you ask Musgrave?" snapped Wallace.

Mrs. Cooke stiffened. "Certainly I did. Why do you single him out?"

“No reason except I’d like to make sure nobody’s playing favourites in this here inquiry.”

Murdoch saw an angry flush sweep across Mrs. Cooke’s face. She was obviously aware of the gossip surrounding her and Musgrave.

“You might not consider it so serious, detective, but it is theft. How dare somebody take my carriages without permission. I would like you to pursue the matter.”

Murdoch shrugged. “I wish I could be of more help, Mrs. Cooke, but I can see no obvious explanation. At the moment, my other investigation is my priority. I was actually wanting to have a few words with you in private.”

“What about?”

Murdoch gazed at her in astonishment. “Your husband’s death, ma’am.”

“Quite so.” Her jet ear bobs jingled as she swung her head. “You can go, Mr. Wallace. But I am warning you, in my opinion, my husband tended to be too lax and I have no intention of continuing in that manner.”

And you’re going to lose a lot of your employees, thought Murdoch.

The cabbie left, anger in every movement.

Mrs. Cooke flashed Murdoch a self-satisfied smile. “You have to be firm with these people. They are like children and think they can get away with anything unless you show them from the beginning that they cannot. I’m sure some unscrupulous man thought he would take advantage of my misfortune to cheat me, but whoever it is has another think coming.”

She took out a black-bordered handkerchief from her reticule and dabbed at her eyes, which seemed quite dry. Murdoch almost expected her to throw her veil over her face as she transformed from hard-headed businesswoman to bereft widow.

“Have you made any progress with the case?” she asked.

"We are still gathering information, ma'am, which is why I wanted to speak to you."

"What now?"

"I asked you before if your husband was a gambler and you denied it."

"Of course I denied it. He was no such thing."

"I have heard from different sources that, indeed, he was. That he was deeply involved with a gambling crowd."

Mrs. Cooke drew in her breath sharply, rather like a fierce horse. "Who told you such dreadful lies? He was a church-going man and as honest as the day is long." She leaned her head in her hands. "I can't believe such slander is being spoken about him. Who told you?" she demanded again.

Murdoch wasn't about to lose Ferguson his job. "My intent is not to malign your husband but to find out if he had enemies who wanted to do him harm."

"Well, I have no such knowledge. He was a most respected and loved individual. It is as obvious as the nose on your face that he surprised a thief, a cruel and, if I may use the word, perverted man."

"Mrs. Cooke, I have no desire to add to your unhappiness at this time, but your husband received a message that so alarmed him, he rushed from your house. Perhaps his assailant was a thief, but whoever it was knew enough about your husband to lure him to the stables. We have not found that message, so we are in the dark as to its contents."

"I assume he was told that something was amiss, one of the horses taken ill, for instance."

"Wouldn't he have mentioned that to you? It would seem natural to do so."

"My husband kept business matters to himself. He didn't want to bother me with such things."

"And yet you knew exactly how much money was in his safe."

Mrs. Cooke turned quite red again. Tough as she was, she couldn't control that telltale flush. "That is different. That was our livelihood, sick horses are not my concern, they are Elijah Green's."

"Mr. Musgrave told me that he overheard a quarrel between your husband and Green. Do you know what they were arguing about?"

"His wages probably. Green has worked for us for many years, and in my view he is quite adequately paid but you know how these people are, they're never content. Mr. Cooke did mention to me on more than one occasion that Green was pressing him for a raise."

Murdoch felt like catching her in her contradictions but refrained. Speaking of being a betting man, he would wager a week's wages himself that Adelaide Cooke was the kind of woman who would winkle every detail of business out of her husband. She wasn't sitting behind that desk with absolute authority for no reason. Whether this sharing included Cooke's little sideline, Murdoch wasn't sure.

"I also heard that you yourself recently had quite a barney with your husband."

For a moment she looked as if she would explode into a flurry of protestations, but instead she nodded. "I regret to say that is true. It was nothing, just a squabble that married people have from time to time. I wished he would spend more time at home and he said he had the business to take care of. It was nothing more than that."

Although she was presenting it as only a trifle, Murdoch had the feeling she was basically telling the truth. However, as the post-mortem had revealed, Cooke had contracted a venereal disease at some point. His adventures hadn't been limited to placing wagers.

Mrs. Cooke tapped her fingers on the desk. "Are you thinking of arresting Elijah?"

"I do not have a suspect in mind at the moment, ma'am."

“Good,” she said. “I can’t afford to be without a stable hand right now, and he is quite a reliable worker.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Crabtree had written out a list of hotels and guest houses that were within comfortable walking distance of Cooke's Livery, and Murdoch decided that the nearest of them would be his next call. Even though he knew Ferguson and Whatling had talked over the events of Wednesday night, and had probably influenced each other, he saw no reason to doubt Whatling's statement. The negro messenger was likely the same man the coachman had seen heading up Mutual Street in the direction of the stables. As for the woman by the tree, whether she was connected with the case or just an innocent passerby, at this point, Murdoch couldn't tell.

Also gnawing at the back of his mind was an incident that had shaken the city two years earlier. A young man from an affluent and respectable family had been shot on the threshold of his own home. The victim had not died immediately and was able to give a description of his assailant, but for a while the police went off on the wrong track, searching for a slim, dark-skinned male. Shortly afterwards, a mulatto woman confessed to the crime. She had been seen on several occasions dressed in men's clothes, and it was difficult to know what had shocked the city more, the shooting or the masquerade.

That particular woman had passed easily as a man, and Murdoch wondered if Cooke's messenger was in disguise. Both the messenger and the coloured woman who had inquired at the livery had been described as stocky, middle-aged, medium height. The raspy voice that Ferguson had mentioned was suspicious. But then, heaven forbid, it could be the other way around. The maid who had come to the stables might be a man, for all he knew.

He braked, stopped, and looked over his list. The closest hotel to the livery was the Elliott House, on the corner of Church and Shuter. It had the reputation for excellent service at a high price and for catering to American visitors, the proprietor being a Yankee himself. The widow that Green had mentioned seeking a cab could afford to keep her servant well dressed, and the maid had told Green they were American. He turned along Shuter and soon reached Church Street. To walk from there to Cooke's Livery, he guessed, would take ten minutes at the most.

Elliott House was a large, gracious building, which sat in private grounds dotted with shrubs and well-placed benches, and he could see some of the guests walking on the sun-dappled lawn, enjoying the air. He parked his bike against the low iron fence that ringed the property and walked up the path to the door. A doorman, his back as straight as a sentry's, was standing on the steps and he swept the door open for Murdoch to enter.

"Reception straight ahead, sir," he said. Murdoch wondered if this little courtesy merited a tip but decided against it. Another young man with a ruler-straight parting in his black hair was standing behind the desk engaged in a telephone conversation.

"Yes, ma'am, certainly. I'll make a note of that immediately. Have a good journey, it will be most delightful to see you again."

He hung up, saw Murdoch, and greeted him effusively in a high-pitched voice.

"How may I help you, sir?"

Murdoch took his calling card out of his pocket and handed it to the young man, whose name plate identified him as Mr. Oatley.

"I'm trying to find two people who I have reason to believe are guests here, or were until recently."

Oatley examined the calling card and looked at Murdoch apprehensively. "Not counterfeiters, are they? We had trouble last year, but I thought the gang had been broken up."

"No, not counterfeiters. More like witnesses that I'd like to question. One is a widow from America, the other is her servant, a negress, middle-aged, medium height, dark skin. Are they staying here, perchance?"

Oatley frowned. "Oh dear, you're talking about Mrs. Dittman. She arrived last week from New York. She does have a coloured servant with her. She's the only one of our guests who answers to that description. Mrs. Dittman herself is not well and regrettably she has seldom been out since she got here. Is she in, er, is she in difficulties?"

"I don't believe so, but I would like to speak to her."

Oatley looked nervous and his voice squeaked even more. "Is it absolutely necessary, detective? We rely on our unblemished reputation for catering to a good class of people."

"I shall be most discreet, I assure you. But, yes, it is quite necessary." Murdoch was tempted to ruffle the clerk's smooth feathers by telling him he was working on a case of assault and suspicious death, but he was afraid the clerk might have hysterics.

Oatley stood on his tiptoes, leaned over the counter, and pointed with the tip of his gold-nibbed pen. "She is in the dining room for her luncheon. The waiter will take you to her."

"And her maid?"

"She is eating in the servants' hall downstairs."

For a moment, the young man's eyes showed a spark of avid curiosity. "Am I to know the nature of the case, detective?"

"Not at this moment, sir. I cannot disclose details."

With a nod, Murdoch headed for the dining room. Another liveried servant opened the door for him.

There was only a smattering of guests present, which gave the pristine white tablecloths and silver cutlery the opportunity to shine in the sunlight pouring in from the deep windows. The wall covering was flowered burgundy, the thick carpet was also lush with flowers. The room spoke of money. Lots of it.

"May I show you to your table, sir?" A waiter, as formally dressed as a clergyman, stepped toward him. He was holding a velvet-covered menu in his hand.

"I'm not eating, thank you. I'm looking for a Mrs. Dittman. Mr. Oatley said I would find her here."

With the merest of sighs, the waiter returned the menu to the podium by the door. "Mrs. Dittman is the lady seated by the window. Come this way."

"No, don't bother. You have another guest to deal with."

A portly man had entered the dining room. The waiter greeted him warmly and led him away. Murdoch stood for a moment, wanting to get a look at the woman in question, but either by choice or because she had been assigned that particular spot, she was partly obscured by a large potted fern. All Murdoch could see was the back of a thin woman, soberly dressed in grey. She was wearing a widow's bonnet, but she had lifted the short veil while she ate. Her clothes signified she was no longer in deepest mourning, but it was anybody's guess, with Her Majesty Queen Victoria as a model, how long she had been widowed.

Murdoch walked over to the table, his footsteps completely muffled by the carpet.

"Excuse me, ma'am."

He hadn't intended to startle her, but she jumped and twisted around to look at him. Murdoch removed his hat. "Mrs. Dittman?"

"Yes. Who are you?"

"Detective William Murdoch, ma'am. I wonder if I might have a few words with you?"

"What about?"

She had the abrupt, straightforward manner of speaking that he tended to associate with American ladies. Murdoch hesitated.

"It's a rather private matter, ma'am. Do you mind if I sit down?"

"Not as long as you don't mind if I finish my meal. I have paid enough for it and I don't like cold bacon, even if you Canadians do."

"Of course, ma'am. Please continue. I wouldn't interrupt you in this way if it weren't a matter of some urgency."

"Pull up that chair, then."

Mrs. Dittman must have been well into middle age, but she was still a strikingly handsome woman with strong, chiselled features and well-shaped hazel eyes. She would have been more so except for the gauntness of her cheeks and eyes that were too deeply shadowed. Her dark hair, drawn back into a knot at the nape of her neck, was liberally streaked with grey but was still thick and abundant.

He sat down, and she went back to her meal.

"I understand you have a maid, a negress?"

"That's right, Faith. The best there is. Why? Surely there's no problem with her staying with me. I'm not well. I need her. She's not eating in here. She's in the servants' kitchen, but Mr. Hirsh said he had no objection to her sleeping in my suite. It costs enough."

Murdoch was a little taken aback by the rush of words. "I'm not here to question your personal arrangements, ma'am. The reason I asked about your maid is because I am

investigating a suspicious death and I have to track down anybody who might be considered a witness to the case.”

Mrs. Dittman dabbed at her mouth with the napkin. “You are being most mysterious, sir. What suspicious death are you referring to and how could Faith possibly be a witness? We are visitors here.”

“Did your maid go to Cooke’s Livery last week, to try to hire you a cab for the evening?”

“What day are you referring to?”

“A week ago, Tuesday last.”

“Ah yes. I did not know that was the name of the place but, yes, I sent her to find a cab. I wanted to attend a special lecture by a visiting professor of physiology, but as it turned out I was not well enough to go out. Why is it of import?”

“The stable hand said a woman of her description was inquiring at the livery on that particular night, and I need to confirm his statement.”

“I see.” Again she wiped the corners of her mouth with the napkin. “I do hope you’re not going to tell me he is the one who has suffered an unnatural death?”

“No, ma’am. It is the owner who has died. His name was Daniel Cooke. You don’t know him by any chance, do you?”

She frowned. “How could I know of him? As I just said, I am a stranger here.”

She pushed her plate forward and a waiter who had not been in Murdoch’s view suddenly appeared and whisked it away.

“May I bring over the sweet trolley, ma’am?”

“No, thank you. I have had more than enough.”

In spite of her insistence on continuing to eat and the price of the meal, Murdoch saw she had left most of the food on her plate.

“I do beg your pardon if I spoiled your luncheon, ma’am.”

"You didn't. I lose my appetite very quickly these days, but that's neither here nor there. Is there anything else you want to ask me?"

"I don't think so, but I would like to have a word with your maid."

"Faith? She won't add anything to what I've just said."

"I'd just like to hear from her personally, if you don't mind, ma'am. It won't take long."

"Very well. They probably won't let her in here and you probably don't want to go to the servants' hall. We'll have to go to my room. I'll have Oatley ring for her."

She stood up, pulled the veil down across her face, and walked to the door. Her stride was steady enough, but Murdoch had the impression that it cost her something to move like that.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Mrs. Dittman's room was on the ground floor at the rear of the hotel. She didn't wait for Murdoch but led the way down the hall, unlocked her door and went in, leaving him to follow. It was an airy room, elegantly furnished, and by the look of it one of the more expensive apartments in the hotel.

"Please take a seat, Mr., er, what was your name again?"

"Murdoch, ma'am. Detective William Murdoch."

She went over to the windows and began to draw the curtains.

"I find the sunlight hard on my eyes. I hope you don't mind," she said.

He made a noncommittal nod, noting as the curtains closed that the French doors opened onto a small patio and a wide lawn. Easy to come and go unseen.

"Do you have other servants, ma'am?"

"Not travelling with me, if that's what you mean. I have a housekeeper and a groom back in New York. Don't tell me you want to question them as well?"

Murdoch smiled benignly. "Not at all, ma'am. I was only inquiring because Mrs. Cooke reported a strange visitor the

night her husband died. Her butler hadn't seen him before but thought the man was a negro."

"Really? Surely Toronto isn't so devoid of coloured people that every negro is related to every other? Just because I employ a negress doesn't mean I am responsible for all the darkies in the city. Both my housekeeper and groom are of Irish stock, by the way. I took in Faith when she was a young woman, and she has been as reliable as her name. Ah, here she is."

The door opened and a coloured woman entered. She was neatly dressed, middle-aged, medium height, and rather stout. She was carrying a tray with a silver coffee pot and china on it.

"I thought you'd like your coffee. Mr. Oatley mentioned that you didn't take any in the dining room."

She had a rather harsh accent that Murdoch had heard before from New Yorkers. She glanced over at Murdoch. "I didn't know you had a visitor, madam. Shall I fetch an extra cup?"

"No, thank you, please don't bother," Murdoch said quickly.

"This is Mr. Murdoch, Faith. He's a local detective and he wants to ask you some questions."

"Really, madam? Concerning what?"

"Last week you tried to hire a carriage for me from one of the local stables."

"Ah, yes, I remember, madam. Tuesday it was. We wanted one for the next day, but they weren't available. Is there something wrong?"

Murdoch answered. "The proprietor of that particular livery has died under suspicious circumstances and I am investigating the case, Miss...?" He waited for one of them to fill in the maid's surname but neither did. "I understand that you had a conversation with the stable hand who was in the barn at the time? His name is Green."

Faith studied him with her dark eyes, but she didn't answer immediately. She poured out some coffee for her mistress first and handed it to her.

"Bring my medicine, will you, Faith? I hope you don't mind, Mr. Murdoch. I am supposed to take it at a regular time. Go on talking, though, you have our attention."

He might have their attention, thought Murdoch, but he didn't have control of the situation. Mrs. Dittman was very much in command. He waited while the maid went to the table at the side of the bed and returned with a brown bottle. She poured some of the contents into her mistress's coffee. Murdoch thought the drink looked like brandy, but that could be considered medicine, he supposed.

"Do you recall the man I am referring to?"

Faith addressed him without looking at him.

"It is rather vague in my mind, but I believe I do. I never knew his name, but if you're talking about a coloured man, big build, soft spoke, it must be this Green cove."

"It was a wet night on Tuesday. I wonder why you didn't make use of the hotel telephone for your inquiry."

Mrs. Dittman answered, "Faith is frequently confined indoors because of my state of health. She needed some fresh air."

"It wasn't raining hard when I went," added the maid. "I ain't, pardon me, I isn't made of sugar."

"According to Mr. Green, you also asked after one of the local ministers. A Reverend Archer. Is he an acquaintance of yours?"

"I have never met the man. But somebody at my own church told me about him. I hear he's a powerful good preacher. I likes a lively sermon so I thought I'd introduce myself."

"Faith is quite a devout Baptist, aren't you, dear?"

"I am."

"Just one more question then, ma'am. Did you notice anybody else on the street near the livery? Anybody at all?"

Faith pursed her lips, thinking. "No, can't say I did. There might have been somebody, but I didn't pay no mind."

Murdoch closed his notebook. "Thank you so much for your help."

He stood up.

"Show the gentleman out, will you, Faith? Thank you, Mr. Murdoch. You have livened up a rather dreary day."

"I'm glad to hear it. It must be disappointing to visit a strange city and not be able to get around as you must have hoped."

He was being deliberately disingenuous, but she wasn't in the least put out.

"Yes, it is. But we are planning to hire a Bath chair and Faith will wheel me. I am eager to see the cathedrals, in particular. After all, Toronto is the city of spires, is it not? Unfortunately, the weather has been against us, until now."

The maid was standing at the door, holding it open for Murdoch.

"Good afternoon to you then, ma'am."

Mrs. Dittman bowed her head graciously while Faith stared straight ahead.

She'd answered readily enough, but he thought it odd that she'd shown no curiosity about his questions. Usually people were agog to hear lurid details of deaths. It might be because she was a servant and didn't feel she had the right to ask. On the other hand, her mistress hadn't inquired either.

Inside the room, Mrs. Dittman added some more brandy from the brown bottle into her coffee cup.

"Do you want some, Fiddie?"

"I won't say no to that. My nerves are fair frayed. I didn't expect no detective to be sitting here jawing with you."

"I had no way to warn you but you were quite superb. Bernhardt herself couldn't have done better."

She poured them each a full glass of brandy.

"*Oh be joyful*," said Mrs. Dittman.

Faith laughed. "You got me out of an awkward spot there when he asked why we hadn't used the telephone. But butter wouldn't melt in your mouth." She imitated Mrs. Dittman's softer voice. "Toronto *is* the city of spires, is it not? Where'd you hear that?"

"I read it in the guidebook. Do you know there are one hundred and seventy-two churches in Toronto now."

"And most of them dull as dishwater, I'll wager."

Mrs. Dittman smiled. "Seriously, Fiddie, the detective struck me as a shrewd man."

"Not if he's a policeman, he ain't."

"He did have nice manners."

"Phony. Besides he didn't have nice manners to me."

"I thought he treated us the same."

Faith hooted. "You might think so, but I can tell the difference. 'Yes, ma'am, no ma'am, to you, yes, miss, no miss to me.'"

"I don't think so...Oh never mind, it's not worth arguing about."

"If he's as clever as you say, shall we fly the coop then?"

"No, of course not. We haven't finished our task yet. When that's done, we'll go."

"Are you up to it?"

For an answer, Mrs. Dittman beckoned her maid to sit beside her on the couch. "By myself, no. But with you beside me, my rod and my staff, I am invincible and have always been so."

Faith laughed out loud. "You and your fancy talk. You never stop, do you? Here, lie back and put your feet up on my lap and I'll rub them for you. I can tell you've been in pain today."

“Pour some more brandy and it will all be forgotten. Besides, I have eaten the sweet meat of revenge and that has soothed my pain.”

“There you go again.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Amy lifted up Jacob from the sink where she had been bathing him and handed him over to Murdoch, who was standing at the ready with a warm towel. James was already bathed and dried and lay contentedly in his cradle watching them. Charlie and Katie had gone out for the evening to celebrate their engagement, and Amy and Murdoch were taking care of the twins. It had taken a bit of persuading to get Katie out of the door, but with repeated assurances from Amy (*It won't be too much trouble*) that the boys would be well taken care of (*Oh, I know that*), the two of them had left.

Murdoch was enjoying himself. "I remember my mother giving Bertie a bath. He was always afraid of water and she'd get me to distract him by blowing bubbles." He sighed. "I took a lot of pride in getting him to laugh, and momma often let me do the whole business myself."

"Poor Bertie," Amy said softly.

"Yes, he didn't have much of a life, sad little titch."

After they became lovers, Murdoch and Amy had spent many hours talking far into the night about their own lives. She had been born into a well-educated family, the only girl and the youngest of five, both mother and father teachers themselves. "I knew from childhood that I wanted to be a

teacher and the best I could be. My father, bless him, was considered slightly mad by the folks in the town because of his unorthodox habits and teaching methods, but he was well loved. He died far too early, and my mother grieved herself to death. As I was only twelve at the time, I considered that very selfish of her and I still do. My brothers all went into professional life, two doctors, a lawyer, a clergyman, very High Church. Except for my brother, the lawyer, who is distinctly eccentric, I cannot understand why they are so conventional, considering how we were brought up, but they are and they do not approve of my bohemian ways."

Even though she had said it lightly, Murdoch thought he detected a hint of wistfulness in her voice and he had pulled her close to him.

"Well, I thoroughly approve."

She tweaked his nose. "That's because I come to your bed without benefit of clergy."

"No, it's not. I'd make us legitimate any time you say the word."

"Never. Sorry, Will. I can't."

He'd been hurt by that answer, but as she had taken away the sting by sitting astride him and kissing him, he recovered quickly.

On another occasion, he had told her some of his own tales; of the cruel treatment his father, Harry, meted out to all the family, including his wife; of his sister, Susannah, who had fled to a cloistered convent as a young girl and died there; of Bertie, a simpleton, and the youngest, who shortly after their mother's premature death had suffered a heart attack when he was only twelve years old.

"Only Harry is left and who knows where he is?"

It was Amy's turn to comfort him. "Perhaps someday that look will be gone from your eyes, Will."

Jacob was wriggling in his arms so Murdoch placed him in his cradle and rocked it gently.

“How do you like your new beds, boys?” he asked them.

The single cradle Katie had arrived with was far too small, and Charlie had immediately set to work to make two new ones. Murdoch had done his part by painting them light blue. He’d even sketched galloping black horses across the headboards. Amy had provided material for Katie to quilt, and now the twins lay, plump and well cared for by their new family.

Amy cleaned up the bathing area while Murdoch rocked both cradles.

“I hope Charlie and Katie do stay here. I’d miss these little fellows.” He addressed the twins. “Even though you do wake me up at all hours, don’t you? Not to mention periodically plucking the hair out of my moustache.” James dribbled happily at him. “Ha, you think that’s funny, do you? Wait till you’ve got more hair, I might have a go at pulling that.”

He suddenly became aware that Amy was watching him. She had an expression on her face that he couldn’t quite read, but before he could ask her what was wrong, they heard knocking at the front door.

“Oh no, I hope that’s nobody from the station come to fetch you,” said Amy.

“I’ll answer it.”

The knocking was repeated.

“Hold on, I’m coming.”

He opened the door expecting it to be indeed an urgent message from the station, but to his surprise, there on the doorstep were Dr. Julia Ogden and Professor Broske. It was the professor who had been doing the impatient knocking as his hand was already raised to knock again. “Good evening, Mr. Murdoch,” said Dr. Ogden. “I hope you don’t mind us disturbing you, but we were out for an evening stroll. I’ve been showing Marc, er, Professor Broske, some of the delights our city has to offer.”

It flashed through Murdoch's mind that perhaps that meant they'd gone walking in the Mount Pleasant Cemetery on the off chance of stumbling over some old bones.

"I've examined the objects you asked me to and analyzed both the piece of sacking and that potion you brought me and I thought you'd be interested in the results," continued Dr. Ogden.

"And I understand you wanted to ask my opinion about something," said Broske. "So here we are, at your service."

Murdoch stepped back from the threshold.

"Please come in."

Broske gestured to Julia to go in front of him and they entered the hall. They were both wearing summer boaters and the professor had on a pale yellow linen suit that was undeniably foreign.

"One of my fellow boarders and I are taking care of Mrs. Tibbett's twins for the evening," said Murdoch as he led the way down the hall. "We are in the kitchen."

Broske's eyes brightened. "Twins! How marvellous. I am always happy to encounter them. I have conducted several experiments with twins that have yielded remarkable results."

Murdoch could feel himself stiffen. Given what he'd already seen of the professor's experiments, he wouldn't let him get within ten feet of the boys.

He pushed open the kitchen door. Amy turned around to greet them and put her finger to her lips. "They are almost asleep."

Murdoch made gestures to indicate they would go upstairs and Amy nodded.

"I'll come up shortly," she whispered.

Broske was casting acquisitive glances at the twins, but he kept quiet and the three of them trooped out again.

Murdoch ushered his guests into his sitting room.

"I'd offer you some tea, but I'd better not go down to the kitchen just yet."

“Do not fret, Mr. Murdoch. I am so experienced a traveller I always come prepared,” said Broske, and he took a small silver flask from his inside pocket. “This is what in my country we call pomace brandy or, more popularly, grappa. It is not as smooth as the brandy I have sampled in Canada, but consequently, one drinks less. May I pour you a little, Miss Julia?”

“No, no, thank you.” Dr. Ogden’s hasty refusal did not bode well for the brandy, but Murdoch was curious.

Broske poured some of the liquid into the flask cap and handed it to him. “Good health.”

Murdoch took a sip and almost choked. His lips and tongue caught fire and the brandy blazed a trail down his throat, taking layers of skin with it. His eyes watered and he coughed.

The professor grinned at him. “Grappa is something of what you would call a taste of acquirement.”

Murdoch handed him back the cap. “I think that’s enough for me, thank you.”

Casually, Broske tossed back the remaining brandy in one gulp, wiping his thin moustache delicately. “Ah, that warms the heart, does it not?”

Murdoch thought that for a physiologist, the professor’s sense of anatomy was decidedly inaccurate. The grappa had gone nowhere near his heart but had headed directly for his stomach, where it was now burning a hole.

“To quote one of England’s eminent men, Mr. Samuel Johnson, ‘Claret is the liquor for boys; port, for men; but he who aspires to be a hero must drink brandy.’ And perhaps we must admit that is especially true of those who drink our Italian brandy.”

Broske tossed back another capful of grappa and waved the flask at Murdoch questioningly. Dr. Ogden rescued him.

“Shall I tell you my findings now?”

Murdoch didn’t trust his voice, so he nodded.

“First I should say that the piece of sacking was not very useful. The blood was mammalian and of fairly recent origin, but that was all I could determine. There were some hairs that were likely equine, but as it was in a stable, that proves nothing. The same was true of the whip. I saw nothing at all on either of the Indian clubs or the rope.”

“And the vial?”

“That, on the other hand, proved to be quite interesting. Considering it is called the gold cure, I found no gold at all. Professor Broske confirmed my analysis of the contents.”

“No gold. Much cocaine.” The professor’s English was rather suddenly truncated.

“Quite so,” added Julia. “There was a small per cent of chloral, which as you know has a sedating effect, water, and a 10 per cent solution of cocaine. I’ve heard of this before. Unscrupulous or ignorant practitioners claim to cure addictions to alcohol and so they do, but they replace one addiction with another. Men stop drinking but then they begin craving the ‘cure’ or the cordial or whatever they want to call it, not knowing they are now dependent on another drug.”

“Friend should be got out,” Broske slurred. “And soon.”

There was a tap at the door and Amy came in. She was still wearing her comfortable at-home clothes with silk pantaloons fastened at the ankle and full over-tunic. Broske jumped to his feet, his brown eyes glowing with admiration.

“Allow me to present Miss Amy Slade,” said Murdoch. “You know Dr. Ogden, of course, and this is Professor Marc Broske. He is visiting here from Italy.”

Amy held out her hand to Broske and, predictably, he held it in both of his for an instant, then planted a kiss on her fingers.

“Enchanting, mademoiselle.”

Dr. Ogden pursed her lips. “We can’t stay much longer, but I understand you have a question you wish to ask the professor, Miss Slade.”

Amy described her visit to the Blongs' house and the condition of Mary Blong.

"I suspected she was faking the seizure, but I'm not sure. William thought you might be able to help. Perhaps you might even come to see the girl yourself."

Broske beamed. "I have a most simple method to detect fakery, which is infallible. But I am due to return to my homeland in five days so we must do something soon. Can you make an appointment for me to come to see the girl?"

"I'll arrange it as soon as possible," said Amy. "I do thank you, professor."

"Not at all, I am only too happy to demonstrate my skill." He turned to Dr. Ogden. "Perhaps you will come also, Miss Julia? I am sure you will be most fascinating to see the test."

"I would love to be there." She smiled at him, her annoyance gone.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

The following morning, Murdoch decided to pay another visit to Thomas Talbert. He had supposedly known Cooke for a long time, and he might be able to confirm what Whatling and Ferguson had said about Cooke's predilection for gambling.

It was another lovely fresh morning and Murdoch found himself whistling as he rode down Mutual Street. Last night, just as Dr. Ogden and Professor Broske were about to leave, Charlie and Katie had returned and somehow in the introductions the news of their engagement came out. Broske insisted on celebrating but, fortunately, Charlie had a bottle of good whisky in his room and they were able to avoid the grappa in the several toasts that had followed. It was almost midnight when the doctor and her companion had finally left, Broske kissing Amy and Katie's hands with much gusto. Murdoch noticed he even slipped in a quick kiss to his Miss Julia's cheek. He smiled at the memory and at how pink Dr. Ogden had turned.

He leaned his wheel against the fence and opened the gate to Talbert's front garden. He paused. All of the front-room blinds were pulled down. It was almost nine o'clock, surely it was not too early to call on the man? He checked the upper windows and there the blinds were up. A sharp

pinch of alarm gripped him. Of course, it was quite possible that Talbert had fallen asleep downstairs, but where was his housekeeper? There was a quiet to the house, a feeling of something not normal that was troubling. He went up to the door and knocked. Nothing stirred. He knocked again harder and this time he turned the door handle, pushed open the door, and stepped into the hall.

“Mr. Talbert? Mr. Talbert? Detective Murdoch here.”

The unmistakable odour of death hit his nostrils.

The portières to the parlour had been drawn back and that door was wide open. He could see Talbert lying on the floor, near the fireplace. He was on his right side with his knees tucked tight to his chest.

Murdoch ran to the body and crouched down. He could see a single bullet hole in the neck just below the jaw. The bullet must have pierced the artery and there was a wide spatter of blood around the area where Talbert was lying. He was fully dressed and wearing the same light-blue smoking jacket that Murdoch had seen him in before. It was covered with blood down the left side. His wrists were tied in front of him and his arms had been drawn down over his bent legs. A poker was thrust behind his knees and over his elbows, pulling him almost into a ball. Incongruously, on top of the body was a scattering of bills, mostly five-and two-dollar notes, some of them stuck to his jacket by the blood.

Murdoch tried to lift the arms so he could get a better look at the other side, but rigor was at its height and the body was completely stiff.

Suddenly, Murdoch heard the front door open.

“Hello, Thom, I’m back,” called a female voice.

“Damn.” He jumped to his feet and ran over to the door, but he wasn’t in time to prevent Mrs. Stokely from entering the room. Seeing him, she stood stock-still at the threshold.

“Who are you?”

Murdoch managed to get himself between her and the body. “I’m Detective Murdoch, ma’am. I was here the other

day. Please don't come in here, ma'am. Let's go out into the hall."

She stared at him for a moment, then peered over his shoulder. The colour bleached out of her face and she suddenly looked like an old woman.

"Thom, oh my God."

She would have run over to the body, but Murdoch anticipated her and caught her by the arms. She wasn't screaming, but she was saying desperately over and over, "Oh my God. Oh my God."

"Mrs. Stokely, you cannot come any farther. A crime has been committed. Please do as I ask."

As gently but as firmly as he could, Murdoch eased her back through the door, pulling it closed behind him. Once in the hall, he got her into the chair by the hat stand. She was shaking from head to toe and there were flecks of saliva at the corners of her mouth. Murdoch crouched in front of her so he could meet her eyes.

She stared at him, uncomprehending. "What happened to him?"

"He has been shot."

That elicited more agonized exclamations.

"Shot? Who did it? Who? Who in God's name would kill a good man like Thom?"

"I don't know yet, ma'am. I came here to talk to him and this is how I found him."

He took a handkerchief from his pocket and handed it to her, but she gazed at it as if she hadn't seen one before and the tears slid unchecked down her face.

"I should have been here. I should have. Oh why did I leave him last night, of all nights?" He could hardly make out what she was saying.

"Were you away from home, ma'am?"

"Yes, I, I...visit my granddaughter on Friday nights. I just got back."

"When did you leave?"

"Leave? I don't know. It must have been at my usual time."

"When would that be, ma'am?"

"When? At eight o'clock, I suppose."

"Did Mr. Talbert have any visitors?"

"No. He never did on Fridays. He...he liked to have his weekly pipe...I don't like tobacco, you see..." Her voice trailed off.

"Did he mention anything about expecting anyone?"

"Not at all. He told me to enjoy myself, gave me a k -" She halted. "He told me to have a nice time and...and give his regards to my granddaughter. She has been recently confined, you see. Oh, how will I ever tell her?"

Murdoch straightened up. "Mrs. Stokely, do you have any brandy in the house?"

"Brandy?" She fluttered her hand. "Yes, Thom, Mr. Talbert, always kept a bottle in the kitchen. He didn't drink himself, but sometimes offered it...offered it to his...to his visitors."

Murdoch held out his hand. "Let's go into the kitchen, shall we?"

Unsteadily, she got to her feet and allowed him to lead her down the hall. She was leaning heavily on his arm and he could feel the violent trembling of her body. He sat her at the kitchen table, elicited the location of the brandy, and poured her a stiff cupful.

"Take a good swallow," he instructed her and was pleased to see a little colour return to her cheeks as she did so. She wiped her eyes and nose.

Murdoch took the chair across from her. "I know this has been a terrible shock, ma'am, but I must ask you to do something for me. I need to send for a constable. Do you think you can get to your neighbour's house and have them go to the station?"

"Yes. I can go to Dr. Pollard's. They have a telephone."

“Excellent. Tell them to have the operator connect them with number four station. Say that I need three or four constables here right away. They should also send for the coroner, Dr. Ogden, and we will need the ambulance. Do you remember my name, Mrs. Stokely?”

“No, I’m sorry, the shock has driven everything quite out of my head.”

“I’m Detective Murdoch from number four station. Will you repeat that for me?”

“Murdoch from number four station. I’ll remember.” Her voice was a little stronger now.

“Very good. You are being most brave. Now, let me escort you to the door. Would you prefer to go out of the back door or the front?”

She shook her head violently. “There is a high fence between our property and theirs. What if somebody is still there?”

“I think that is most unlikely, ma’am, but let’s use the front entrance so I can watch out for you. Then I want you to remain at the doctor’s house until I come over myself. Will you promise me you will do that?”

“Yes, Mr., er, Mr. Murdoch. Oh dear, oh dear, what is to become of me?”

“Try not to think of that right now, Mrs. Stokely. The most important thing at the moment is that we get on the trail of Mr. Talbert’s killer as soon as possible. Give me your hand. That’s good. Now let me help you with your jacket.”

As obediently as a child, she slipped her arms through the sleeves. She was normally a stout, buxom woman, but it was as if she had suddenly shrivelled.

“We’ll leave your hat, shall we?”

She shook her head. “I’m not going to Mrs. Pollard’s house bare-headed.”

Murdoch handed her the hat, probably her Sunday best, of beige felt, wide-brimmed, and profusely decorated with

brown taffeta ribbons and yellow feathers. She put it on and straightened up.

He offered her his arm again. "Here we go, then. Hold on tight."

Making sure he was walking on the side nearest to the parlour, he escorted her to the front door and stood on the porch while she made her way to the large house next to them. He waited until she had knocked and been admitted, then he went back inside, bolting the door behind him. He didn't want any more unexpected visitors.

Somehow when he returned to the sight of the dead man, the scene looked even more horrible. Seeing the position the body had been forced into, Murdoch felt a rush of anger that was also tinged with fear. Was he truly dealing with a lunatic? First a brutal whipping that had brought about the death of Daniel Cooke, now this. He could only assume the two deaths were connected.

He made the sign of the cross over the body.

"May the Lord have mercy on your soul."

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Murdoch took out his notebook and his tape measure and began to walk slowly around the body, trying to understand what had taken place. There was no sign of any struggle. Talbert's armchair was where it had been when Murdoch visited him. Murdoch picked up the briar pipe that was perched on the brass standing ashtray beside the chair. There was still unburned tobacco in the bowl and a spent Lucifer next to it. He had lit his pipe once only. Murdoch was a pipe smoker, he knew how ornery they could be sometimes, refusing to draw on first light. So Talbert was just getting settled in and then he heard something, perhaps something as innocuous as the door knocker. He couldn't call on his housekeeper to answer, so he put his precious pipe on the rim of the ashtray, placed the newspaper down on the floor, picked up the lamp that Mrs. Stokely had thoughtfully filled with oil for the night, and went to see who was visiting him at this hour.

And who was it, indeed?

Murdoch walked back into the hall and looked around, but his first impression had been correct. Nothing had been disturbed. The clay pot of ferns just inside the door was intact. If it had been knocked over, it would have smashed to pieces. There was a rather worn dhurrie rug covering

some of the plank floor and it did not seem to have been moved. All of the framed pictures on the walls were straight. Murdoch glanced at them briefly. Talbert had favoured nature paintings. He had two of the noble stag, one standing at bay with the hounds, the other overlooking his harem of does on the hillside. Murdoch could not imagine anybody overpowering the old man in this narrow hall, however strong they were, without knocking something off the wall. Talbert had not been threatened by his visitor. He had led the person into the parlour.

Murdoch returned to the corpse. First he measured the distance of Talbert's head from the fireplace fender: eight inches. The location of the bullet hole below the jawline was strange. If he had been shot while he was in this crouched position, the entry wound would surely have been much higher. That would be easier to determine after the post-mortem when he could see where the bullet had exited and the trajectory it had followed.

Next he went to measure the length of the blood spatters. The longest had actually hit the edge of the couch, but the streaks grew shorter like the struts of a fan closer to the fireplace. There were two breaks in the lines: one fairly close to the right edge and the other where Talbert was lying. It made sense then that Talbert had been standing, facing the opposite armchair, when he was shot. His killer had been a few feet away to his left. As he was shot, he spun to his left and collapsed, likely on the hearth, but Murdoch could not definitely determine that until he could move the body and check for a contusion on Talbert's head. The brass fender around the hearth seemed untouched.

He bent down and removed the bank notes that were scattered on top of the body and placed them carefully to one side. There was one Imperial Bank ten-dollar note, two Bank of Montreal five-dollar bills, and eight two-dollar and five one-dollar bills from the Dominion Bank. Forty-one

dollars in total. The blood-stained bills were in varying states of newness and some had stuck together.

Talbert's wrists had been tied with a striped green and gold necktie. Before he undid the binding, Murdoch made a careful sketch of the way the body had been positioned. Then he examined the hands. The fingers were caked with dried blood, as were both palms. Talbert had probably clutched his neck in an instinctive but vain attempt to stem the bleeding. The necktie, however, showed few blood stains and the knot had been fairly loose. It would seem that his hands had been bound after he had been shot and he must have then been pulled into the ball position. It was grotesque. Obviously, binding his hands would serve no purpose when the man was already dead, so why do it?

There was a thunderous knocking on the front door and he went to answer it.

Four rather breathless constables were on the doorstep. He let them in.

"Thomas Talbert has been shot, sometime last night by the look of the body. He's in the parlour. You might as well have a look at him but don't go too close. I haven't had a chance to examine the carpet yet."

The men crowded into the hall.

"Sergeant Gardiner was able to reach Dr. Ogden," said Crabtree. "She'll be here as soon as she can."

"Good. I was afraid we'd have to take Johnson."

Burley, who was a young rather sensitive constable second class, let out an involuntary gasp when he saw the carnage.

"Who'd do that to an old man like Talbert?" asked Crabtree.

"Was it a robbery, sir?" Fyfer asked.

"I'd say not. The assailant actually left money on the body in the amount of forty-one dollars. I'll give you more of a briefing later. Right now we need to get the proceedings moving. George, you stay with me. Fyfer, I want you to

round up a jury, fast as you can. Dewhurst and you, Burley, start going through the house. Don't rush, use your wits, and just try to determine if anything at all is out of order or if you see anything that might be related to the murder."

"What sort of thing, sir?"

"I don't know, Dewhurst," Murdoch answered impatiently. "A threatening letter, a bloody handprint. Use your noddle."

Murdoch beckoned to Crabtree. "George, he's stiff as a board, but I want to get him up so I can see the exit wound and the blood pattern underneath him."

Together they hauled up the body, which moved in one grotesque piece. There was a large hole just below the right temple where the bullet had exited.

"That must have blown out some pieces of bone. Hold him there for a minute and I'll find them."

Murdoch moved away from the body, creeping close to the floor. There they were. Several small fragments of the skull were on the floor where the body had covered them.

"I was right," said Murdoch. "He was shot while he was standing and facing that chair. The bullet travelled on an angle upward, so either his killer was sitting or crouching or he was much shorter than Talbert, who was tall, about six feet at least. We can get an exact measurement later. Rigor is complete so he has been dead at least twelve hours, which gives us time of death anywhere between eight and eleven o'clock last night. Dr. Ogden might be a little more precise."

There was another knock on the door. "Speaking of Dr. Ogden, that's probably her now. Let her in, will you, George?"

Murdoch smoothed out a sheet of the newspaper and placed the bloodied bone fragments on top of it.

"Goodness gracious, Mr. Murdoch, what have we here now?"

Dr. Ogden, looking slightly dishevelled, as if she had dressed in a hurry, came into the room. Murdoch was not surprised to see Professor Broske at her heels.

"Detective, we meet under the worse of circumstances, don't we?"

Getting rather drunk on grappa last night wasn't a particularly bad circumstance, but Murdoch knew what he was referring to.

"What have you ascertained so far, William?" Dr. Ogden asked.

Murdoch related the conclusions he had come to about how the murder had happened.

"So he was tied up post-mortem?"

"I'd say so."

"And why would somebody do that?"

Before Murdoch could reply, Broske said, "It has to be a statement, does it not? A message of some kind. There's a secret society that exists in my country. They call themselves the Cosa Nostra. Apparently they will sometimes mutilate the body of their victims as a warning to others, to intimidate them."

"What others?" Murdoch exclaimed, exasperated. "If I hadn't come here early, his housekeeper would have discovered him. I cannot imagine she is a target of this intimidation, she's a middle-aged woman."

"Is she of the same race?" Broske asked.

"No, she's a white woman."

"And the dead man was a negro," continued the professor. "Perhaps there are those who objected to him employing a white woman as his housekeeper."

Dr. Ogden looked shocked. "Surely not here, professor? The situation is unconventional to be sure, but I cannot imagine anybody in this city being so incensed they would shoot an old man and commit such an indignity to his body."

Broske shrugged. "Alas, one cannot underestimate the depth of depravity human beings can sink to, and in my

experience the more so when they are filled with righteousness.”

It was a sobering thought, and for a moment all of them paused. Then Murdoch said, “I was just about to examine the carpet more closely, doctor. There was so much blood spilled, the murderer would have had to walk through it, especially when he was tying Talbert up.”

“It is perhaps best if we stand aside then?”

“Thank you, ma’am.”

Crabtree, Broske, and Dr. Ogden watched while Murdoch got to his knees and studied the blood stains. A partial print was clearly visible.

“This is from a man’s boot, blunt-toed, average size. Ah.” He bent closer. “There’s another print here. Just the toe, and it’s not that distinct, but it’s a rounder shape than the other.”

“So, there were two people here,” said Broske.

“I believe so.”

“Poor fellow didn’t stand much of a chance, did he?”

CHAPTER THIRTY

"I don't know where to put you, sir." The Pollards' butler was a stooped, grey-haired man who looked as if he should have been pensioned off a long time ago. He was highly flustered.

"Where is Mrs. Stokely?" Murdoch asked.

"She is in the servants' hall, but Cook has to prepare luncheon and there really is no room there for you to interview her."

"That's all right, the drawing room will suit me." Murdoch was being rather cruel and he knew it. This old man was only obeying the rules he'd lived with all his life. Unfortunately, Murdoch found himself more and more irritated by those rules.

The butler dithered. He had a runny nose and a drop of mucus was hanging from his right nostril. "I'm afraid that won't be possible, sir. Mrs. Pollard is entertaining her discussion group this afternoon."

"What time?"

"Two o'clock."

"I'm sure I'll be finished by then. And I would like to speak to your mistress as well."

"She isn't downstairs yet." The droplet fell onto his lapel.

"Would you be so good as to call her? You do know what has happened?"

"Oh yes, sir. It was I who telephoned your station when poor Mrs. Stokely arrived on our doorstep. A terrible tragedy, indeed."

"I wonder if I might ask you a question, Mr....?"

"Neely. My name is Neely. I will try to answer."

The butler was looking so alarmed that Murdoch almost didn't proceed, but he knew any information could be useful.

"You have worked for Dr. Pollard for some time, I gather?"

"Yes, sir. For thirty years. He had just started his practice."

"And Mr. Talbert has been your neighbour for all that time, I understand?"

"That's right. And he hasn't been a moment's trouble. His house is as neat and clean as a pin. He paints it regularly, keeps his garden immaculate, removes the leaves when they fall."

"Have you ever noticed him receive visitors who you might regard as sort of, well, sort of shady?"

Neely took a spotless handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his recalcitrant nose. "Never. He lives, that is, oh dear how dreadful to speak of him in the past tense, but I suppose I must. He *lived* a very quiet life. It was on rare occasions that I even saw him."

"How long has Mrs. Stokely been his housekeeper?"

"At least six years. She took up the position shortly after she was out of mourning." He glanced over his shoulder and lowered his voice. "My wife, Mrs. Neely, who is the housekeeper here, was quite inclined to make a friend of Mrs. Stokely, but the mistress put a stop to it."

"Really? Why was that?"

Neely shifted uncomfortably. "Mrs. Pollard is most diligent about maintaining the dignity of the doctor's

household as is appropriate to his position. She was not in favour of her cook, my wife that is, bringing a woman into the house who was, er, who was cohabiting with a coloured man."

That explained Mrs. Stokely's comment about not going bare-headed into the Pollard house, thought Murdoch.

"It's my understanding Mrs. Stokely was employed by Mr. Talbert in the position of housekeeper," said Murdoch.

"So she was, but you know how it is...no other live-in servants." His voice trailed off. "Do you have any idea who killed him, sir? We had gypsies through about a month ago. Dreadful vagabonds, they were. Perhaps they returned. They might have determined Mr. Talbert was a man on his own."

"I shall keep that in mind, Mr. Neely, but, no, I don't know yet who his assailant was. And I should therefore speak to Mrs. Stokely without more delay."

Neely moved back. "I'll have to get permission from Mrs. Pollard first, sir. She is most particular, as I said." He paused. "My goodness, I almost forgot. We have two maids here, Molly and Betty. They are young girls from the country, good, sensible girls but when Mrs. Stokely came and told her story, Molly almost went into hysterics. She said that, last night, as she was drawing the curtains in Mrs. Pollard's retiring room, which is on the second floor, she happened to look out of the window and saw two people knocking on Mr. Talbert's door. When she realized she was probably looking at the murderers, she almost fainted. Cook had to fetch her smelling salts. She's still not quite right and has refused to move from her chair all morning, even though Mrs. Neely is sorely busy."

"I must speak to her as well then. Now be so good as to tell your mistress that I have temporarily commandeered the drawing room. But fetch Mrs. Stokely first, will you?"

"Oh dear, yes sir. Come this way, if you please."

Murdoch followed him down the wide hall. Carpeted stairs swept in a graceful curve up to the second floor where the walls were covered with ornately framed paintings. Murdoch wondered how the Pollards' taste in art compared with Thomas Talbert's. Landscapes, rather similar from what he could see, except that the doctor's pictures were larger.

Neely opened the door to the drawing room.

"Mrs. Pollard hasn't requested a fire to be lit as yet. I hope you will be warm enough. May I bring you some tea, sir?"

"Better not, thank you. Mrs. Pollard might not take too kindly to me occupying the drawing room and taking tea."

He'd hoped to get a smile from the old man, but Neely just looked even more apprehensive. He backed out.

Murdoch made his way to a Turkish couch adjacent to the fireplace, an impressive piece in white marble. A large brass fan was in front of the hearth, and the mantel was laden with figurines and gilt-framed photographs. Murdoch had been in several drawing rooms since he had become a detective, and he had come to the conclusion that a fixed principle of society was that the more money you had to spend on objects, the more you were impelled to display them. The Pollards' drawing room was crammed with furniture, more drapery than you would find in Mr. T. Eaton's department store, and enough paintings on the walls to start a gallery.

There was a timid tap on the door and Mrs. Stokely came in. "Mr. Neely said you were here and wanted to speak to me, Mr. Murdoch."

Murdoch got to his feet. "Please sit down, ma'am. How are you feeling?"

He didn't need to ask. Her round face was blotchy with crying and in spite of her stout figure, she seemed frail. She sat down and wiped at her eyes.

"Not too well, sir. It has been the most dreadful shock."

"I know it has, Mrs. Stokely, and I do thank you for your help in the circumstances. I need to ask you a few questions, but I won't keep you long."

In spite of her upset, he noticed that her gaze had been wandering around the room. This was probably the first time she had been in the Pollards' drawing room. He waited until her attention returned to him.

"You told me earlier that Mr. Talbert had no visitors last night, nor seemed to be expecting any."

"That's right."

"How did he seem to you when you left? Was he his usual self? Was he preoccupied at all? Did he appear to be afraid of anything?"

She shook her head vigorously. "Not at all afraid. Thom was not a timid man. He wasn't preoccupied either. Of course, he was upset about what had happened to Mr. Cooke. They didn't get along too well, but he had known him for a long time."

Murdoch had taken out his notebook and was making discrete notes. He looked up at her. "Why do you say Mr. Talbert and Mr. Cooke didn't get along?"

She dabbed at her eyes again. "He didn't speak about it really, but they had a falling out some years ago now. Thom, Mr. Talbert, that is, used to own those stables, you see, but he fell on hard times. There were two fires that destroyed all his carriages and killed most of his horses. Mr. Cooke offered to buy the stables. I don't think it was a very good offer, but Mr. Talbert was forced to accept or starve. He didn't want to because he was very proud of what he'd built up over the years. He was always talking about those old times and the position he'd made for himself in society." She sighed. "I'm only telling you what Thom said to me, you understand, but he once let it slip that he wondered if Mr. Cooke had set the fires himself. I was shocked to hear that, of course, and asked him why he thought so. 'Because my run of bad luck was all too convenient for him,' was his answer. Apparently,

Mr. Cooke did offer him a job at the stable afterwards, but Thom absolutely refused. He only went back recently to help out young Elijah."

"Are you saying, Mrs. Stokely, that the animosity was all on Mr. Talbert's part?"

"I suppose I am, aren't I? Thom was a very kind man and most generous, but he could hold a grudge like a limpet. You hadn't better get on his bad side."

"Were you yourself acquainted with Mr. and Mrs. Cooke at all?"

Mrs. Stokely paused and glanced away from Murdoch. "No, we didn't mix much in society...but I have heard that his marriage was not a happy one. Mrs. Cooke is not what I'd call a warm-hearted woman."

"I've been hearing stories that Mr. Cooke was a gambler. Did you know that?"

She shifted in her chair. "Well, it did come out one day. In the last little while, he'd been late paying Elijah's wages. When he heard about it, Thom said Mr. Cooke was wasting money on cards and betting rings."

At that moment, the door was flung open and a large, pear-shaped woman burst in. Her hair had obviously been hastily pinned and she was still in her housegown, but her anger was palpable. Murdoch stood up politely.

"I must ask you, sir, how you have the temerity to enter my house and make use of my own drawing room? The affair is sordid enough without it coming right to my very hearth."

Mrs. Stokely shrank back. There was sufficient ambiguity in the other woman's remarks to pierce her soul. Murdoch stepped closer to the irate Mrs. Pollard.

"Madam, I am conducting an inquiry into the death of your closest neighbour. It was at my request that his housekeeper, Mrs. Stokely, came to your house so that I could summon help. She has had an appalling shock, as you can see. There was nowhere else where I could have the

privacy I needed to speak to her. I apologize for not getting your specific permission, but I assumed that like most ladies in your position you would be gracious enough to accommodate us."

The bite in his tone was apparent to Mrs. Pollard and she flushed.

"You assumed incorrectly, sir. I will not have my drawing room turned into a common police hall. I understand you wish to interview my entire household, including myself."

"That is correct, madam. I am told that your maid may have seen visitors at Mr. Talbert's house last night. Her description will be helpful to me."

"Nonsense. She is an empty-headed country girl who would say she sees elves and fairies if you were to ask her."

"The people who visited Mr. Talbert last night were neither elves nor fairies, Mrs. Pollard. They were likely murderers capable of shooting an old man..." He had been about to tell her about Talbert being tied up after death so that he could shock her into some humanity, but unfortunately the person who would most suffer from that information would be Mrs. Stokely. He held his tongue.

However, Mrs. Pollard either read something in his face or his words got through to her. Whatever it was, her puffery subsided like a collapsed balloon and her tone became more conciliatory.

"I see. Well, you must do your duty, obviously. I would appreciate it if you would move to the dining room for your interviews, however. I am entertaining my ladies discussion group here this afternoon."

"I would be glad to move to the dining room, Mrs. Pollard. It will be more convenient. But I must tell you that there will be no discussion group, ladies or otherwise, here this afternoon. Until my search of the Talbert house is complete, I will be using your dining room as a base of operations. You and your staff are confined to the house

until further notice. I also will require to look at the boots and shoes of every occupant."

This puffed her up again.

"Surely not Dr. Pollard's?"

"Yes, ma'am. Including Dr. Pollard's. I am sending for one of my constables, who will be here on duty as long as I find it necessary."

The thought of what Inspector Brackenreid's reaction might have been if he was at the station ran fleetingly through Murdoch's mind. The inspector would have been apoplectic about Murdoch's behaviour. Commandeering the house of one of the city's doctors was unheard of.

Murdoch indicated the door. "Now, if you don't mind, Mrs. Pollard, I haven't quite finished my interview."

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Although he would have liked to find a justification for leaving Constable Dewhurst on duty at the Pollard house, Murdoch knew he was stepping on the edge of the law if he were to do that, so after about two hours, he returned to Talbert's house and sent the constable to start questioning the nearby residents. He assigned Burley the task of informing Elijah Green about what had happened.

"Note carefully how he reacts. If he has any information at all that might be helpful, bring him over to the station right away."

Burley went off, sober at his first serious task. Crabtree was assigned Mrs. Cooke and Fyfer the cabbies.

The Pollards' maid, Molly, had turned out to be so nervous, constantly on the verge of hysteria, that Murdoch had hesitated to push her. The problem was her testimony seemed to change from minute to minute. Yes, she had seen two people being admitted to Talbert's house just before eight o'clock the previous evening, and she thought one of them was a man, rather short and dressed in a long, dark mackintosh. On the other hand, it was raining and the person was holding an umbrella so she didn't get a good look. The other person could have been a woman, but she had gone into the house so quickly it was hard to tell. She

supposed it might have been a man in a cloak, but she wouldn't swear an oath to it. About half an hour later, Molly had heard a loud noise, a sort of bang, but thought it was Cook dropping a pot. She hadn't realized it was a gunshot until she heard about the murder. Murdoch had hastily ended the interview at this point and sent the girl off with Mrs. Neely.

Mrs. Stokely had confirmed that the necktie used to bind Talbert's hands did not belong to him. She also remembered noticing that his good worsted coat, a navy blue one, was missing from the hall stand. Given that at least one of the murderers would have been splashed with blood, Murdoch assumed the coat had been stolen so the stains would be hidden.

He told her about the money scattered on Talbert's body, but she had no explanation for it. He didn't keep much money in the house, just enough to pay for monthly housekeeping expenses, rarely more than fifteen dollars or so. She told him where to look in the upstairs bedroom dresser, and indeed Fyfer had found about fourteen dollars in a cash box.

"Did Mr. Talbert have a will?" Murdoch asked.

"Yes," she said. "He had no children so he left what little he had to...me." She averted her eyes. "You might be surprised to know, Mr. Murdoch, that I was Thomas Talbert's legal wife. We married five years ago."

"Why did you keep it a secret?"

"Thom insisted. He thought it would be better if I was known as his housekeeper. He said people would no doubt gossip about me behind my back, but at least they would talk *to* me. If I were known as Mrs. Thomas Talbert, there were many who would not do even that. Perhaps he was right. My granddaughter has married a man who aspires to city office, and she had made it clear she doesn't approve of my living arrangements. To know that Thom and I were married would probably turn her away from me forever."

She twisted her thin gold wedding band. "Do you think I shall be able to keep it secret, that we were husband and wife?"

"I don't see why not. As far as I know at this point, it has no relevance to our inquiry."

"Thank you, Mr. Murdoch."

Then he recalled what Broske had said about the ever-present prejudice against miscegenation. "Who else knew about your marriage?"

"Hardly anybody. Only the preacher at our church and his wife." She wept again. "Thom was such a good companion. He deserved to die peacefully in his bed."

She had unconsciously echoed Professor Broske's words about Daniel Cooke.

Murdoch bicycled back to the station. He had just entered when Gardiner beckoned him over. He had a conspiratorial expression on his face and his eyes were lively with curiosity.

"We received an urgent telephone call for you. The speaker had a strange accent, possibly Irish, and he sort of whispered. Callahan could hardly make out what he was saying, but he wrote it down as best he could."

He handed Murdoch a slip of paper.

Murdoch. I am in dire need of that book you promised me. I hope you have it and will bring it over this evening. Same time and place as before. Never mind the fire inspection.

"He wouldn't leave his name. He said you would know who it was," added Gardiner. He touched his forefinger to the side of his nose. "Big reader, is he?"

Murdoch nodded. "You might say that."

"I didn't know you were doing a fire inspection. Isn't that Inspector Brackenreid's job?"

"Yes, it is. Strange comment, I must say."

"Callahan thought the voice was oddly familiar but couldn't identify it."

Murdoch shrugged. "There are lots of Irishmen in the city." He headed for the stairs. "I'll be in the inspector's office."

"Enjoying that, are you, Will?"

"Probably a little too much."

Murdoch sat behind the desk and pushed on the button that opened the cigar dispenser. He selected a cigar and lit it. The inspector's message had come at an awkward moment, but he didn't feel he could ignore it. He was hoping to convene all the constables working on the Talbert case at about five o'clock, and Dr. Ogden said she would be ready to do the post-mortem examination at six. He decided he'd better go to the Ollapod Club now and see if he could get to talk to Brackenreid earlier than planned. He wondered why there was such urgency.

Keeping in mind Brackenreid's warning that he would not be allowed admittance to the institute under any circumstances, Murdoch parked his bicycle at the corner of the street and walked casually back to the main gates. Here he bent down and pretended to tie his shoelace so he had a chance to look into the grounds through the railings. Several men were strolling in the direction of the main building, and he remembered that this was close to the time when the residents received their injection. At first sight, he couldn't see Brackenreid. He fussed a bit more with his shoe but noticed that one of the attendants was glancing over his shoulder in his direction, so he stood up and moved on. Frankly, he had no idea how he was going to get inside. Then he had a stroke of luck. A tall, spindly man came

trotting across the road, heading for the gates. Murdoch hurried back and got to him just in time.

"Hold on, good sir, I'd like a word with you. Do you work here?"

The fellow shook his head. "I do, but I can't talk to you right now, I'm already late."

Murdoch grabbed hold of the gate so he couldn't open it. "That's too bad, but you'll have to be even later. I'm a police officer and I am here on a serious matter."

That stopped him for the moment. "What sort of serious matter?"

"We've had complaints that the institute is being run in ways that break the law."

The man stared at him in disbelief. "Such as?"

"I'm not at liberty to say at the moment, but I need to gain entry to the building and in such a way that nobody will know who I am."

"You can't. No visitors allowed."

"I wouldn't call myself a visitor exactly. I'm an investigating officer. What is your name, by the way?"

Murdoch took out his notebook to make it all the more official-looking.

"Robert Tennyson. But see here, I've got nothing to do with anything illegal. I just do my job best I can and do what the doctor tells me."

"I believe you, Mr. Tennyson, but that doesn't mean to say the magistrate will. I might have to take you to the court right now and testify."

Murdoch could see that all the residents were inside now. Tennyson also saw that and he looked very nervous.

"Lord help us, they've gone in. They lock the door and I'll get the bird if I don't get in there. I have to assist with the injections."

"Do you, indeed?" Murdoch took out his wallet, hoping he had some money in it. He had a five-dollar bill, his last until next week. "I am authorized to recompense citizens at

special times for their inconvenience. Here's five dollars and I promise that, if I have to, I will put in a good word with the magistrate on your behalf."

Tennyson stared at him, then back through the gates into the now-empty lawn. Murdoch waved the bank note under the man's nose. The scent of free money could be very persuasive. The attendant took it.

"All right. I think I can manage something. Go around to the back. I'll meet you at the gate in about ten minutes."

"Done."

Murdoch stepped back and Tennyson shoved open the gate and ran to the door, just getting in before it slammed shut.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Tennyson stashed Murdoch's clothes in a locker in the attendant's common room. He had outfitted Murdoch in a black short jacket and beige linen trousers. They were intended for a shorter man, but Murdoch hoped nobody would notice.

"Tell them you're replacing Davis for the day," said Tennyson. "They won't question it. We get temporary help quite often. You can do the check in. I'll put the list in front of you. Tick off the residents' names when they call them out and when the attendant gives you the signal, send them for their injection."

"That sounds easy enough."

"Come on, then."

Murdoch followed him down the hall and into the lounge. There were about twenty or so men standing in a curving line that was aimed at a cloth screen at the back of the room. They were chatting with one another and nobody paid him any attention. Murdoch took a quick look around and saw Inspector Brackenreid near the front of the queue. Their eyes met and Brackenreid, cool as an old pro, turned his surprise into a fit of coughing that elicited a concerned few pats on the back from one of his fellow residents. The inspector obviously hadn't yet been able to comply with the

rules and he was still in his dressing gown and night shirt. His watchdog, Cherry, was nowhere to be seen, and Murdoch hoped he was off the leash for the time being.

"Here's your list," said Tennyson. "Sit at that table next to the screen. I'll be at the back serving the tea and coffee, but I'd rather you didn't know me."

Murdoch took the chair and put his list confidently on the table. There was another attendant standing near the screen. He was a plump fellow, clean-shaven except for a wide, bristling moustache.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Davis's replacement."

"Get sharp then. We should have started already."

He disappeared behind the screen and Murdoch looked at the first resident who was standing in front of him in the queue.

"Leiter, Frank," said the man.

Murdoch found his name on the list and checked it off. Leiter knew what to do and he walked behind the screen, out of sight. Meanwhile, Murdoch checked in the next resident and after a few minutes the first fellow reappeared.

"It's all yours, Hennessey," he said. The second man went in and the procedure was repeated, although Hennessey seemed to take a little longer. Nobody questioned Murdoch's presence at the table. He could see Tennyson at the far end of the lounge walking among the residents with a tray of refreshments. One or two of the men were in night clothes like Brackenreid, but most were dressed in suits, none of them shabby, which was to be expected. As far as Murdoch could tell, they all seemed healthy and happy and the hubbub of talk was animated.

Brackenreid was at the table and he said his name.

"Who's doing the dirty?" he asked with a jerk of his head in the direction of the screen.

"Er, I'm not sure. He's got..." Murdoch made a gesture indicating the attendant's startling moustache.

"That has to be Raymond and I won't have him," said Brackenreid loudly. "No. I absolutely refuse. The man should have been a veterinarian, not a doctor's assistant."

Raymond popped his head from behind the screen. "I heard what you said, Mr. Brackenreid, and I must say, I take offence to your remark."

"Do you, indeed, then the arrow must have hit the target," said Brackenreid in his best bully voice that Murdoch was so familiar with. "I'm still hurting from your attack yesterday."

Murdoch could hardly believe this performance. The inspector had missed his calling.

He pointed at Murdoch. "I'd rather have this man here give me the medicine."

"That's not possible," said Raymond. "He's only a temporary help."

"I don't give a damn about that." Brackenreid glared at Murdoch. "You know what to do, don't you?"

Murdoch nodded vigorously. "Of course."

"Come on, then." Brackenreid headed toward the screen. There was no stopping him and Raymond stepped aside.

"Why don't you do the check in? I'll just deal with this one." Murdoch winked at the attendant and whispered, "Don't worry, I'll fix him."

Brackenreid led the way behind the screen and Murdoch pulled it closed around him.

"Quickly, Murdoch," he hissed. "We don't have much time. If I don't get out of this place today, I'm stuck here indefinitely. My wife and my doctor are coming tonight to sign commitment papers. In my best interest, of course."

"How is the program working, sir?"

"It's a heap of horse plop, if you ask me. For which people pay a hell of a lot of money. Did you get that medicine analyzed?"

"Yes, I did. It contains quite a sizable amount of cocaine."

Brackenreid guffawed jubilantly. "I thought it was something like that. Cavanaugh is getting men off drink by getting them addicted to cocaine. No wonder his patients are so loyal. Who did the analysis of the medicine?"

"Dr. Julia Ogden."

"Excellent, she's an acquaintance of my wife's. She'll believe her."

"Is everything all right in there?" Raymond called.

"Yes, we're almost done," Murdoch replied.

Brackenreid indicated a dresser on which were lined rows of vials filled with golden liquid. There was a hypodermic syringe on a cloth on top of the dresser.

Then to Murdoch's horror, Brackenreid turned his back, bent over, and lifted up his night shirt, presenting a rather plump and somewhat hairy bottom.

"Do it, man."

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"The syringe. You've got to give me the needle."

"Good Lord, is it absolutely necessary?"

"Yes. The vials are counted. And if you breathe a word of this to anybody at the station, I'll have your liver for breakfast. Understood?"

"Yes, sir. But I do want to warn you, I am not familiar with syringes."

"You've played darts, haven't you?"

"I have but -"

"Same thing. Come on, hurry up."

Murdoch picked up the syringe, balanced it between his forefinger and thumb, and aimed it into the inspector's right buttock.

Brackenreid let out a banshee scream and he wasn't acting. The syringe was left dangling. He took a step backward, tumbled onto his rear, and crashed into the

screen, bringing it down. "You fool, you incompetent ape. You're even worse than Raymond."

The fall had driven the point of the needle deeper into his flesh and he was roaring in earnest. Raymond and some of the residents came rushing to help. Brackenreid struggled to his feet, shaking them off. With a grunt, he extracted the syringe.

"I'm going to report this," he shouted. "You!" he pointed a dramatically accusing finger at Murdoch. "You come with me. We're going straight to see Mr. Cavanaugh."

"I'll send for somebody," said Raymond.

"Never mind. I want the man himself to give an explanation to the superintendent himself or I'll see he never works here again."

The attendant smirked. "I warned you he was only a temporary staff."

Murdoch lowered his head, looking suitably chastened. Tennyson had come hurrying over and he was righting the screen. "Let them go, Raymond, we've got to finish."

The attendant looked as if he would protest, but Brackenreid shoved Murdoch ahead of him toward the door. "Come on, you."

They got out into the hall, leaving a ripple of excitement behind them in their wake. The residents hadn't had such a lively afternoon since the most recent inmate had an attack of the delirium tremors.

Once in the hall, the inspector halted and rubbed his buttock with a moan.

"Sorry, sir," said Murdoch, "but you did say to think of darts."

"It felt more like you were throwing a bloody javelin."

"Where to now, sir?"

"I've got to get home to my wife and convince her, this is absolutely the wrong place for me." He looked at Murdoch. "Where are your own clothes?"

“There’s a room just down here that the attendants use. I bribed one of them to get me in here.”

Murdoch thought it wouldn’t hurt to let Brackenreid know that he’d paid out his own money.

“Good thinking.”

Luck was still with them and the hall was deserted. Murdoch opened the door to the room and they went inside. He handed Brackenreid his clothes and the inspector changed into them immediately. He had lost weight during his stay at the institute. Murdoch’s trousers and jacket were tight but not as bad as they would have been a while ago.

“There’s a rear door that the attendants use,” said Murdoch.

He checked the hall first to see if they were safe, then led the way to the door. They practically ran down the path, through the gate, and didn’t stop until they were at the end of the street where Murdoch had left his bicycle. Brackenreid was gasping for breath, but he thrust out his hand.

“Murdoch, I am forever in your debt. I shall have your clothes sent round to you tonight. And all being well, I will return to the station tomorrow morning.”

“Yes, sir.”

They shook hands and Brackenreid scurried off, Murdoch’s hat pulled well down over his face.

Murdoch waited until he was out of sight, then let go of the laughter he’d been choking back. It would take him a while to get the image of Brackenreid’s buttock as dartboard out of his head.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Three constables and Murdoch were seated around the table in the duty room. All of them were enjoying meat pies courtesy of the station petty cash, which Murdoch had seen fit to filch. He knew they had all worked a long day, and in his opinion, hungry men were easily distracted from the task at hand by thoughts of supper. He'd also ordered Fyfer to make a pot of tea, fresh leaves, if you please. Inspector Brackenreid was a miser when it came to doling out the small allowance the officers were permitted for tea, milk, and sugar. He actually checked to make sure they were reusing the tea leaves in the big pot.

Murdoch was drawing a map of local streets on the brown wall of the duty room. "I'll wipe it off later," he said.

"Might be a good thing to have permanently," said Fyfer. "It's certainly helpful."

"Inspector Brackenreid wouldn't like that," said Dewhurst, who always took a perverse pleasure from being the voice of doom.

Murdoch wondered how much he was going to be able to draw from the bank account of Brackenreid's gratitude before it ran out. "You never know, he may come back a new man and totally approve."

He couldn't help but notice how much at ease the constables were without the inspector's unpredictable presence. Murdoch had invited them to undo the top buttons of their uniforms in the warm room. Their helmets were on the hooks by the door.

He checked his watch. "I don't know what's keeping Crabtree, but we should start. Let's hear what you've got."

Burley, the youngest, spoke up first.

"Elijah Green appeared to be genuinely shocked by the news of Thomas Talbert's death. He said he couldn't understand why somebody would want to kill a man of Talbert's age. He asked if the motive was robbery, and I said we didn't think so. He had no suggestions or opinions as to who or why."

"Fyfer? What about Mrs. Cooke?"

"She was in the company of Paul Musgrave so they received the news together. Both expressed great surprise. Neither had any idea, they said, who had done the murder, but Mrs. Cooke is convinced there are gypsies in the area. She took it for granted that robbery was the motive, although she said she didn't expect that Mr. Talbert would have had much to steal. She became quite tearful and she said the news brought up the tragedy of her own husband. All this time, Mr. Musgrave was a great comfort to her."

He let the inference hang in the air.

"Constable Dewhurst, anything from the cabbies?"

"I'd say nothing different from what you've just heard. Shock, surprise, no ideas as to who did it. Like you told me, Mr. Murdoch, I didn't let on about the way Talbert was tied up, but the cabbie, Wallace, did remark that we'd probably find it was, as he put it, 'a tribal matter.'"

"What the hell did he mean by that?"

"He thought the murderer must have been another negro man, sir."

Burley gave a little cough. "I think I have something promising, Detective Murdoch. After I had spoken to Green, I

returned to the scene of the offence and I began to interview the residents of the area. I questioned Mr. Magnus Shewan, who lives at 205 Shuter Street near Jarvis. Last night, he was returning from his place of work, which is on Yonge Street. He is adamant he walked by a peculiar-looking couple. So I asks him why he thought they were peculiar and he said the woman was walking a few paces behind the man, as if she were a coulee or some such. The man was definitely shorter than the woman, and he swears they were both dark-skinned. He didn't notice if they turned into any of the houses on the street. He says it was about half past seven when he saw them."

Murdoch drew a dotted line on the wall map, along Shuter from Yonge Street to Jarvis and wrote *MS (7:30)* . He noticed that Dewhurst was smirking.

"Yes?"

"I can top that, sir. I spoke to a Mr. and Mrs. Mario Marino, who live at 243 Church Street, which is a few houses north of Shuter. They are of Italian extraction and I would say you'd call them swarthy, especially Mrs. Marino, who has quite a moustache. Mister is quite short, but Missus is taller and stout. They were going to St. Michael's Cathedral for a special prayer meeting. An Italian man would never hold his wife's arm, as they consider it beneath them and the wives usually walk a few paces behind. They saw Mr. Shewan coming home. They know him slightly as their habits occasionally coincide, but they don't exchange greetings. They find him a very ill-mannered man and said they have tried to be sociable but have been rebuffed."

Burley interjected. "I myself found Mr. Shewan a little taciturn, sir, but I realized he is rather deaf and fairly short-sighted into the bargain, so his lack of manners toward Mr. and Mrs. Marino might not be altogether in his awareness."

Dewhurst's expression made it clear what he thought of that, but Murdoch added the Marino couple to his map.

"Did you confirm there was indeed a church meeting at the cathedral?"

"Yes, sir. There was, and it went from eight o'clock to eleven."

"That's us Catholics for you. We have a lot to pray about, and for," said Murdoch, and the constables dutifully smiled at his little joke. "Sorry, Dick, but I think we can eliminate the swarthy, strange-looking couple from our list of suspects. Anything else?"

"The people I spoke to were generally complimentary in what they said about Mr. Talbert, although he kept to himself by all accounts. Some of them were acquainted with the livery and had met Mr. Cooke. The words used to describe *him* were *moody*, *irascible*, *unpredictable*, although one lady on Queen Street who said she used his cabs regularly described him as a most charming and thoughtful man. To tell you the truth, sir, she is elderly and I think she was getting him mixed up with one of the cabbies who generally takes care of her. Her description of him fits Paul Musgrave."

"Anybody else glean anything as to the general opinion in the neighbourhood about either of the two men?"

Fyfer nodded. "I heard much the same really, although a couple of ladies who live on Shuter Street expressed some disapproval about Mr. Talbert living with a white widow lady."

"They must be members of Mrs. Pollard's discussion group," said Murdoch. "She's of the same opinion."

At that moment, the door opened and George Crabtree came in.

"Sorry, I'm late, sir. I had some business at home to attend to."

"Have a seat, George. There's a pie for you and some fresh-brewed tea. I hope you've got something for me. So far we haven't got much to go on."

Crabtree took out his notebook. "I do, sir. I talked to a Miss Laura Brown. She lives on Shuter Street near

Sherbourne, 292. She has a little pug dog called Tiger and come rain or shine, every evening, she walks him from her house along Shuter Street as far as Church Street and back. And it's always about the same time. She leaves her house between eight and nine o'clock, except on Sunday when she goes at six so she can go to Evensong at St. Peter's. She says that last night, on her return trip, she saw two people walking west on Shuter. She estimates this would be about a quarter to nine. She was able to give me a good description because Tiger was doing his job just then and she had to stand and wait for him. Her impression is that they were American. There was something about the woman's hat apparently that was different from what you can buy in Toronto. The man was most definitely a negro, and he was wearing a long coat and a fedora hat. She couldn't say if the woman was coloured or not, as she was veiled. They were walking quite fast, but the woman seemed to move stiffly. Just as they approached her, they crossed to the other side of the road and she noticed the man helped the woman to step off the curb. She wasn't sure where that was exactly, but she thought she had just gone past Church Street. She continued on her way after that."

Murdoch put in another line on the map and wrote (*Miss Brown, 8:45*) *negro and woman* on Shuter Street, near Church.

"What side of the street was Miss Brown on?"

Crabtree looked discomfited. "I'm sorry, sir. I didn't think to ask her."

"I want you to find out. I want to know exactly which tree Tiger was pissing on. Take her back there if you have to. Talbert lived on the south side of Shuter Street. It might mean something or it might not if the two people, possibly American strangers, one a negro, were walking on that side from that direction. The time certainly fits. Talbert was shot somewhere between eight and nine o'clock."

Murdoch was irritated that George hadn't thought to ask the woman such an obvious question. He leaned over and chalked in a square on the northwest corner of Shuter Street and Church. The Elliott Hotel. An American lady with a coloured servant, even though she was female and Miss Brown had seen a male, was too much of a coincidence to be ignored. He'd better go and have another chat with the redoubtable Mrs. Dittman. And soon.

There was a tap at the door and Sergeant Hales entered. "Dr. Ogden telephoned to say she is sending over her post-mortem report on Mr. Talbert, sir. She says she was able to start sooner than expected and preferred not to wait for you as she has a social engagement for this evening." He glanced over his shoulder. "Hold on. I think I hear something right now. Might be the report. Shall I bring it in?"

"Please do. Maybe there'll be surprises."

There weren't. Dr. Ogden wrote that Thomas Talbert was "well nourished and in excellent health for his age." When he read that, Murdoch thought of Mr. Stokely's sad words: *He should have died peacefully in his bed.* As they had pretty much determined when he examined the body, death was caused by a bullet severing the carotid artery and was probably instantaneous. "The bullet was still lodged in the skull. I have extracted it and will keep it for your perusal. Professor Broske says he has experience in these matters from his time in the last Italian war, and he will be happy to share with you a simple but effective method by which you can determine if the bullet matches the revolver."

"He will, will he? First I have to find a revolver."

He'd been reading the report out loud to the constables.

"Dr. Broske is a friend and colleague of Dr. Ogden's. A man of considerable knowledge, which he is always happy to share."

They didn't miss the irony in his voice, and they grinned at him except for Dewhurst, who probably thought he was serious.

He continued. "The trajectory of the bullet was as we discussed. At an angle of forty-five degrees from entry to exit. The revolver was therefore about two feet lower than Talbert's neck. He is five feet, eleven inches tall.

"There was some slight scarring on Talbert's right kidney and some fatty tissue on the liver, which indicated to me that the subject might have been a heavy drinker at some time in his earlier life. Certainly not now, I would say, from the condition of his other organs. The only other thing unusual was that he had a condition known as hexadactyly or, in layman's language, he was born with six fingers on each hand. He had the more common form known as ulnar hexadactyly, that is to say, an extra little finger. Both of these fingers had been surgically removed in adult life. The most common practice is to suture the small fleshy finger as soon as the child is born and then it simply falls off. However, this did not occur with Mr. Talbert and part of the bone had developed. He had mastoids at some time in his life, which left some scarring in his ears. He also had an undescended right testicle, which would have occurred at birth.

"Yours sincerely,

"Julia Ogden. M.D.

"P.S. There is no doubt he was already dead when he was tied up."

The letter ended abruptly and the writing was hurried. Off to a social engagement with you know who, thought Murdoch. He looked over the constables.

"Any questions? The most relevant part of this for us is the angle of the bullet, of course."

"Can we assume that the assailant was indeed shorter than Mr. Talbert?" asked Fyfer.

"Let's say that's a strong possibility, but be careful about putting on blinkers. He could have been sitting down and been seven feet tall."

“So if what the maid said is true, it could have been the woman, the taller one, who shot him.”

“That is true, Fyfer.” Murdoch rubbed his forehead hard, realizing he was very tired. “All right, I’m dismissing you for tonight. You can get right back at it tomorrow. George, stay for a moment, will you?”

The three young constables collected their helmets and with various buttonings of collars and tightening of belts, they filed out. Crabtree remained at the table. As soon as the door had closed, he said, “I’m so sorry, Mr. Murdoch, I don’t know what I was thinking of, or not thinking of, more likely.”

“It’s not at all like you, George. Is something the matter? Something that’s distracting you? Is it what you were telling me about the other day?”

Crabtree put his hand to his eyes and bent his head. Murdoch realized with a shock the man was trying to push back tears.

“Yes, sir. Forgive me, sir, but I can’t help myself. I know I was whinging about another babe on the way, but I never thought...I never...She’s done away with it, sir. Ellen has got rid of the baby.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

Murdoch had comforted Crabtree as best he could, feeling all the while hopelessly inadequate. Apparently, Ellen had acquired some herbs and brought about a miscarriage. "It would have been difficult to have another babe," cried Crabtree, "but we could have managed. I never would have expected her to do this." What she had done was, of course, illegal, but there was no fear that Murdoch would pursue that.

Finally, he sent the constable home and headed down to the Elliott Hotel to speak to Mrs. Dittman and her maid.

He found them seated on one of the benches in the hotel grounds, and he observed them for a moment, unseen. Mrs. Dittman was leaning against the back of the bench, Faith was sitting upright, staring into space. He thought he saw tension in her body, as if she were bracing herself. Then she reached over and caressed her mistress's arm in a way that was too intimate for a maid. Mrs. Dittman didn't respond and Faith made the gesture again, then she noticed Murdoch and must have said something because Mrs. Dittman looked up immediately. The bench was deeply shadowed, and they were sitting away from the lamp, but even so, he saw that since their last meeting she had slipped further into illness.

"Good evening, ma'am, Miss Faith. I wonder if I might have a few words with you?"

Mrs. Dittman sighed wearily. "More words, Mr., er, forgive me, but I have once again forgotten your name."

"It's Murdoch, ma'am. Detective William Murdoch."

"What is it you wish to have more words about, Mr. Murdoch?"

The evening breeze rustled through the branches behind her and she shivered.

"Faith, will you bring me a shawl?"

The maid frowned. "Won't he want me to be here too?"

"If he does, he can speak to you when you return. Please hurry. I'm quite cold. It should be in the wardrobe."

"We can go inside if you prefer, Mrs. Dittman," said Murdoch.

"No, it's really quite pleasant out here. Besides, what will the manager think if you are seen questioning me for a second time? We will be asked to pack our bags, won't we, Faith?"

"Yes, madam."

The maid darted a quick glance at Murdoch, which was full of malice and fear, then she got up and stalked off before he could offer any objection. He studied her briefly. She was a short woman, perhaps about five feet tall, verging on being stout. Nothing about her was particularly mannish, but he supposed any woman in trousers and a fedora hat could pass herself off as a man. He turned back to Mrs. Dittman and realized she, too, had been watching, but it was he she was studying. Her expression was cold. Then when their eyes met, she gave him a rather charming smile.

"Well, sir?"

"Mrs. Dittman, since I spoke to you last I'm afraid there has been another murder. A Mr. Thomas Talbert was found shot to death in his house early this morning."

"I had no idea Toronto was such a wicked city, Mr. Murdoch."

"This is not at all typical, I assure you. Mr. Talbert lived not too far from here. We have a statement from a witness who was on Shuter last night. She said she saw a couple walking along the street, a man and a woman. The man was a negro of small stature and the woman she described as taller and fashionably dressed. She couldn't tell if this woman was a white woman or a negress, but she was sure both man and woman were of middle age and the witness believes they were American. She claims to have seen them shortly after the time Mr. Talbert was killed. They were walking in a westerly direction, that is they would have been coming toward the Elliott Hotel."

"What is this to me? I did not stir from my room last night. I cannot believe I am the only American in the city or that my maid is the only coloured person here. Besides, you say the woman saw a man and a woman. Faith is female, I assure you, and I have no male servant with me, as I already told you."

"It is not that difficult for a woman to disguise herself as a man."

She laughed. "I suppose not and just as easy for a man to disguise himself as a woman. Perhaps it was really two men your witness saw."

"Point taken, ma'am, but there was another coincidence, the witness described the woman as moving with some difficulty, as do you."

She turned her head away with a wry smile. "As do many women of my age. Growing older can be a curse. You are too young to know it, but you will."

In the gloom, seeing her in profile like that, Murdoch had a sudden teasing sense of familiarity, as if they had met before. Not at the interview he had conducted yesterday but before that. He couldn't place it.

He continued. "When our witness reached her own house, she said she turned to look down the street, but the couple had disappeared. There is no cross street close so we can only assume that they went into a house...or a hotel. The Elliott is the nearest place."

"Really, sir. I'm afraid I do not care for the insinuation. I have nothing to do with this man's death. He is a stranger to me. I do not possess a revolver. I am a visitor here and, as you see, in poor health. I was not expecting to be harassed by the local police about an affair that belongs to this city, not to visitors, however American they may be. Must I be forced to speak to the chief constable? You are all too happy to accept our money, but it would seem we are convenient scapegoats when you are confronted with a difficult case that has you running in circles."

In spite of her obvious ill health, she was formidable, and Murdoch for a moment doubted himself. But only for a moment. Bluster all she liked, there was something going on with Mrs. Dittman and he was sure she was hiding something. It might not be the worst thing, the murder of Talbert, but there was something there.

Faith came hurrying down the path from the hotel, carrying a shawl over her arm. She immediately wrapped it around Mrs. Dittman's shoulders.

"Thank you, Faith. You did not have any trouble finding it, I hope?"

"Not at all, madam."

Murdoch felt a flash of anger. They were talking in code, damn it. What maid wouldn't know where her mistress's shawl was? Faith had remained standing beside the bench. He turned to her.

"Mrs. Dittman said she never left her room last night after the evening meal. Am I to take it that you kept her company?"

He didn't expect a denial of Mrs. Dittman's statement, but he wanted to see how convincing Faith would be.

"Of course I did. She was not at all well and needed me to look after her."

She spoke in a monotone voice rather carefully, as if she was choosing her words. Her face was expressionless.

"I am investigating the murder of a negro gentleman by the name of Talbert. Did you know him, by any chance?"

Mrs. Dittman interrupted. "Really, Mr. Murdoch. If you visited New York I would hardly expect you to know every white man in the city. Why should Faith know Mr. Talbert simply because he was a coloured man?"

"I didn't mean that, ma'am. It was meant to identify only."

"I've never heard of him," said Faith quickly.

Mrs. Dittman pulled her shawl closer about her. "There, you see. Now, if you don't mind, I will go indoors. I don't want to contract pneumonia on top of all my other troubles, as we intend to leave on Monday morning."

Murdoch decided to take a chance. "There is one other thing, ma'am. As I said, Mr. Talbert was shot and the coroner believes he must have died instantly. However, very soon afterwards, he was bound in a most peculiar position." He reached in his pocket and took out his sketch. "It looked like this. He was tied by the wrists and pulled up into a sort of crouch position with a poker under his knees and over his arms at the elbow."

Mrs. Dittman was a woman of great control, but she couldn't quite hide the shock his words gave her. She glanced at the drawing.

"It is, as you say, a peculiar position. One would hardly tie an animal that way."

"Lucky for the man, he was already dead," said Faith.

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Dittman.

"And the position is of no significance to you? To either of you?"

Faith shook her head. "None," said Mrs. Dittman. "Was there no robbery, then? Isn't theft usually at the bottom of

these crimes?”

“The only thing missing was his coat. I believe that the assailant took the coat to cover the bloodstains that must have been on his apparel.”

She shuddered. “This becomes more gruesome as you tell it, Mr. Murdoch. If you will excuse me, I think I have heard all I can handle for tonight.”

She held out her hand to Faith, who helped her to her feet. But Murdoch wasn’t done yet.

“Mrs. Dittman, I would like to have a look around your room. I do not have a warrant on me, but I can soon get one.”

She stared at him. “If I refuse, you will take it as an indication that I have something to hide and presumably I am connected in some way with these two dead men.”

Murdoch hadn’t mentioned Cooke’s name or his relationship to Talbert.

“Oh, let him come, madam,” said Faith. “He’s the sort won’t take no for an answer. He’ll keep coming around like a fly on offal. You need your rest. The sooner he gets his look around, the better.”

Murdoch knew then that whatever there might have been to hide in that room, Faith had disposed of it.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Murdoch heard the clock in the hall strike midnight. He was still awake and sleep seemed to have no intention of visiting him. He couldn't calm down his thoughts.

The house is quiet. I wonder if Amy is asleep. I'm sure she is, she's never troubled with insomnia the way I am. Thoughts are chasing their tails through my brain. "Count sheep, Will," Mama used to say. "Imagine them jumping over a fence one by one. One, two, three." But that rarely worked. Sleep came eventually when I knew Harry was asleep and I could hear his drunken snore. But even then I'd lie there, sometimes until dawn, tense and agitated, going over the latest ugly scene in my mind, rehearsing responses I never had the chance to act upon until I started to grow taller and Harry knew I would fight him if I had to. Oh God, why am I thinking of that again? Is it the whipping that was laid on Cooke? I've seen corpses before and violent death is always disturbing, but these two are among the worst. The pain inflicted upon Cooke was lingering and he wasn't a young man. Neither was Thomas Talbert, he must have been well into his seventies. At least he died immediately. But why? Had he known he was going to die? Had he been afraid? He seemed like a man of courage but faced with death, don't we all quail? Wouldn't I? George is determined

the culprits are Elijah Green and his brother, but I can see no motivation. Robbery in the case of Cooke makes sense, but the whipping changes that completely. What was the connection between Cooke and Talbert except that long-ago purchase? Did Talbert and an accomplice whip Cooke? And then that accomplice turn around and shoot Talbert? Thieves falling out? But why leave forty-one dollars? - Wait a minute! How could I miss that? Two of the notes were stuck together. Perhaps it was meant to be only forty dollars. The price of betrayal, Judas money. So Talbert's murderer considered he had been betrayed. That makes sense except that...there were two people present at the shooting. Thieves then falling out. On the other hand, it could be nothing to do with money. A deliberate ruse to mislead. Did somebody truly consider Talbert a traitor to his own race? Or an impudent coloured man cohabiting with a white woman? Mrs. Stokely and Talbert seemed to have kept their marriage a close secret, but perhaps it had leaked out. The murderer or murderers were familiar with Talbert's routine or they were lucky. He was always by himself on Friday nights. Would they have killed Mrs. Stokely as well if she had been at home? But why was Talbert tied into that cruel position after death? Is Mrs. Cooke involved? She stands to gain much by her husband's death. I can easily see her shooting somebody, yes, but not the whipping or the desecration of Talbert's body. But then again, as Amy reminds me, I tend to be sentimental where women are concerned. Was the intention to whip Cooke to death or whip him so many times and then shoot him? Thirty-seven to thirty-nine stripes. Why does that sound familiar? Where have I heard that before? Prisoners here are usually given ten or fifteen lashes. Thirty-seven is a lot. Oh, thoughts switch off. Think of sheep, fluffy happy sheep jumping over a fence. One, two, three, four... Charlie is so happy I almost envy him. Would I feel like that if Amy agreed to marry me? Yes, I would, but she says she loves me now and asks why I feel the need for some

fossilized ritual? Because I do. Because I'm not a New Man, I suppose. I want to stand in front of the altar and say, "I take you, Amy Henrietta Slade, to be my lawful wedded wife, in sickness and in health...till death us do part." That's it, isn't it? As if making a holy vow out loud before God makes it certain that death will not separate us. As if we are then protected against typhoid, consumption, and all the other ills the flesh is heir to. That's why I want to have and hold her the way I never got the chance to with Liza. I am as superstitious as a Protestant peasant, as my mother would say. Life is so transient. I see Mrs. Stokely weeping for a husband she is not able to tell the world about. Jump, little sheep. Why did my mother ever tell me to count sheep? We lived in the country and I saw sheep all the time and if they did jump a fence it was because they were afraid of something and fleeing for their lives. I cannot fall asleep if I see frightened sheep. I want them to be secure, ignorant of the fate that awaits them, just enjoying lush grass and sun. I'd better think of something else to count. Count how many times I can strike another human being with a whip for no reason except to hurt him. I know we still punish some of our prisoners like that. I had to witness Pryor being whipped, tied on the triangle, sentenced to be punished with fifteen lashes for raping a child of ten. A heinous crime, but I couldn't bear to stand and watch his back as the welts raised until they were oozing blood. To hear his screams of pain. Only fifteen lashes for him and that was enough. And now we're back to crime and punishment, are we? What punishment fits the crime and what doesn't? I accept imprisonment, but lashing or hanging even doesn't undo the crime or reverse time, and whipping Pryor gave no solace to the raped child, although perhaps it did to her parents. Revenge is Mine, sayeth the Lord. Mrs. Dittman's maid isn't that far removed from slavery in terms of her age. I wonder if she once was one. She could have been. Is that it? Are these two women the ones I seek? Is it a vendetta that I

don't know the details of? If so, why these two particular victims, one white, one coloured?

He sat up in bed and leaned over to light his candle. Maybe a pipe would calm him down. He took out his tobacco pouch from his drawer, tamped his best Badger into the bowl of his Powhattan, lit up, and took in a deep, satisfying draw.

After his request to Mrs. Dittman to search her room, he'd felt he had to follow through although he suspected it would be a waste of time. And it had been. He'd looked in the wardrobe for Talbert's missing coat, but it wasn't there. He'd asked both her and Faith to empty out their suitcases; nothing there either. Nothing unusual except a bottle of laudanum in Mrs. Dittman's valise and a bottle of liquor, unlabelled, in Faith's. If they were implicated in the murder of Talbert, they could have disposed of the revolver anywhere. He finally left them, both still and silent, Mrs. Dittman looking haggard. What was the secret they were afraid he'd discover? Were they lovers? Things like that happened and he had witnessed that peculiarly intimate gesture in the garden. Was Mrs. Dittman afraid of the scandal if it came out that she, a white woman, had a liaison with her coloured maid? That was possible, he supposed, although he sensed there was something about their relationship that could not be explained that way. Faith reminded him of a dog whose entire life was focused on its mistress. A fierce dog, he thought, one that wouldn't hesitate to bite. And Mrs. Dittman? She gave orders the way one would to a servant but...but what? Was she too solicitous? Too careful not to be autocratic, or was that just an American trait? He wondered again why she had been so shocked when he told her what had happened to Talbert. No doubt most women would be appalled, but she had reacted to the post-mortem violation, not to the murder itself. Faith had not been shocked.

He was feeling sleepy at last, and he was just about to extinguish his pipe when he heard a light tapping at the front door, the knock of somebody trying to gain access without waking the entire household. There it was again. He got out of bed, pulled on his trousers, picked up his candleholder, and hurried downstairs. No other lights were lit, so the knocking evidently hadn't yet disturbed anybody else.

Paul Musgrave was standing on the steps, and Murdoch could see a carriage at the curb behind him.

"Sorry to disturb you, Mr. Murdoch. I saw your light so I knew you was still up."

"What is it?"

"I thought you might like to take a little ride with me, sir."

"At this time of night?"

"Yes, sir. It has to be at this time of night because this is the only time it happens."

Musgrave was clearly enjoying being mysterious, and Murdoch felt like shaking him. He heard the wail of one of the twins from the back room. He stepped across the threshold and held the door closed behind him.

"You'd better have a good explanation, Musgrave. We have two babes living here and it sounds as if you've woken one of them up. What do you want to say, man?"

"Just this, sir. You know Mrs. Cooke complained that somebody was taking out the carriages and horses without permission or payment. Well, it's true and if you come with me, I'll show you who it is and where they go."

"Tell me now."

Musgrave touched the peak of his cap with his forefinger. "Allow me my bit of fun, Mr. Murdoch. I'd rather you see for yourself. I promise you it will be worth your while."

"Damn it, Musgrave. If you're leading me by the nose, I warn you I have sharp teeth."

"I don't doubt it, sir."

Murdoch stared at him. The man was full of his own importance and clearly was not going to yield up any information until the last minute.

"I'll get my clothes on."

"I'll be at the carriage, sir."

Both twins were howling and the light was showing underneath Katie's door. He hesitated for a moment but decided not to disturb things even more. He dressed quickly and went outside.

Musgrave gave him another irritatingly conspiratorial wink. "We have a companion." He opened the carriage door and Murdoch got in. The blinds were down on the windows, but an oil scone was burning on a low wick and he could make out a woman's figure in the corner. It was Mrs. Cooke. She had abandoned her widow's bonnet and veil and was wearing a plain felt hat.

She flicked her hand at the cabbie. "Get going, Mr. Musgrave. We don't want to get too far behind. Good evening, Mr. Murdoch."

"Good evening, ma'am."

Musgrave called to his horse and the carriage started to move at a good clip.

"Where are we going?" Murdoch asked. He lifted the blind sufficiently to determine they were heading west along Queen Street.

"I don't know. I have put myself entirely in Mr. Musgrave's hands. He is the one who is determined to get to the bottom of this pernicious thieving. I'm thankful that somebody cares." Her tone was aggrieved, as if Murdoch had been negligent in not pursuing the matter with the ardour it deserved. Their eyes met, and for a moment he saw something soften in her expression. "I am aware, Mr. Murdoch, that you consider me an unfeeling woman who

has not shed a tear for her husband. I will not stoop to divulging my private affairs to you, but suffice it to say that my marriage had been unhappy for some time, and we were husband and wife in name only. My affections for Daniel were destroyed many years ago."

She leaned back against the seat and closed her eyes, giving Murdoch no chance to pursue the topic.

"Paul warned me the journey might be a long one," she said. "So, I will take the opportunity to rest a little. This has been a most wearing time."

Murdoch had felt a twinge of sympathy for her when she had spoken so honestly, but the moment had passed and all he could see on her face were the marks of entrenched discontent. He took the opportunity to check out her boots. They were of good leather, old-fashioned and round-toed. She hadn't said a word about Thomas Talbert's death, but he didn't have the impression that she was trying to hide something. She seemed to be completely preoccupied with her own affairs. After a few minutes, he, too, leaned back.

He was awakened by the carriage door opening. Musgrave pulled down the step.

"Here we are. Mr. Murdoch, I suggest you come with me and Mrs. Cooke should remain in the carriage."

"I will most certainly not," she said and followed right behind Murdoch as he climbed out.

"Are you sure, Adelaide? They're a rough crowd."

"I haven't come all this way to sit in a carriage."

So, it is Adelaide now, thought Murdoch. Musgrave handed him a grubby woollen scarf that smelled of tobacco.

"Wrap this around your chin and pull your hat low. You don't want anybody to recognize you. It could make things most awkward. Follow me. Adelaide, give me your arm. We should hurry."

They had stopped on the edge of an open field that sloped away from them and disappeared into a thick stand of trees. The air was pungent with the smell of crushed

grass and horse droppings. Oil lamps were hanging from posts around the perimeter and he could see several other carriages. Musgrave had unhooked the rear lantern and he led the way down a path of trampled grass. In a few minutes, Murdoch could hear voices that grew louder as they finally emerged from the trees. About fifty feet in front of them was a dense crowd of men, buzzing with excitement and all facing a brightly lit, roped-off ring.

“It’s a prize fight,” said Murdoch.

“Quite right about that, sir. They happen here regularly, but don’t let on I told you.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

Prize fighting with bare knuckles was illegal, but Murdoch was in no position to enforce the law at the moment. Musgrave had taken him for a ride in more ways than one.

The ring was cordoned off by four posts with ropes strung between them. Four taller posts were also strung with ropes that crossed and from the centre hung an iron chandelier, incongruous in this setting but which threw a good light onto the ring. About six feet away from the first ring was a second rope barricade behind which were pressed the noisy spectators.

"Can we move closer?" asked Mrs. Cooke. "There's space around the ring where nobody is sitting."

"I'm afraid not, Adelaide. That area is reserved for the high-paying Fancy and the officials."

"Who are those men with whips?"

Six men, two of them negroes, were stalking around the inner space.

"They look most ferocious," she added.

"They *are* ferocious," said Musgrave. "All of them are former bruisers. Their job is to keep the riff-raff behind that second rope. You'd be amazed how excited men can become once the fight has got underway."

“Goodness gracious, isn’t that Alderman Jolliffe down there, just to the right of the post?”

It was indeed Alderman Jolliffe, an ardent and self-righteous Orangeman who was vocal about his anti-Catholic sentiments. Murdoch thought that he just might let it slip to the newspapers that the councillor was attending an illegal prize fight.

They had been speaking in low voices, but one of the men in front of them turned around. He had a notebook in his hand.

“It’s not common to see ladies at these fights, ma’am. I hope you can stand it.”

“She’s a nurse,” said Musgrave, smooth as cream.

The man tipped his hat. “Indeed. Well, I do hope, ma’am, for the sake of the sport that you won’t intervene. I’ve got a wager that says the match will go to twenty-two rounds and I’d hate to lose that money.”

“Get on with your own business, Charlesworth. Nobody’s going to spoil your story.” Musgrave winked at Murdoch. “Mr. Charlesworth here writes up these little donnybrooks for the Fancy to peruse at their leisure.”

The chatter of the crowd suddenly subsided, the spectators responding to some signal that Murdoch hadn’t noticed. On the other side of the ring, a few feet up the slope, was a stone fence and beyond that a barn. At that moment, the barn doors were flung open and a cheer went up from the crowd. Out stepped a posse of men. The two in front were carrying lanterns burning at full wick and behind them was a tall man dressed in white knee-length knickers and a blue singlet. A flowered silk belt was around his waist. He strutted down the path to the fence gate, which was quickly opened for him by two bystanders. Here he paused, removed his old-fashioned tall hat, and tossed it into the ring to the yells of the crowd.

“Who is that?” asked Mrs. Cooke.

"He's the challenger. He goes by the name of the Chopper. He's from up north somewhere. The story is he's a full-blooded buck."

"Who's he fighting?" asked Murdoch.

"Ah, sir. That's the question, isn't it. There he is, look."

The barn door opened again. There were shouts from the crowd but considerably less enthusiasm. A single man held the lamp ahead and behind him, wearing a singlet and black knickers, was Lincoln Green. His belt was red and yellow. Elijah was directly behind him, carrying a towel over his arm.

"Well, I don't know about you, Mr. Musgrave, but I'm not surprised. Green is the one stealing my horses," said Mrs. Cooke. "I never trusted that man and I was right."

Murdoch thought the cabbie would prove himself a first-rate liar if he admitted to surprise at the presence of the Green brothers, as it was obvious he was quite familiar with the whole goings-on.

Lincoln tossed his hat, a brown tweed crusher, into the ring and another roar went up.

The two entourages, each making a circle around their champion, climbed through the first set of ropes. A little terrier of a man in a black cap and fisherman's jersey hopped into the ring.

"He's the referee, name of Christopher," said Musgrave. "A good man, by all accounts. He won't allow any funny business."

Christopher made beckoning motions, and Elijah Green and a man with the battered face of a pugilist who was standing next to the Chopper both ducked under the ropes and walked to the centre of the ring. Here Elijah marked out a line on the grass with the heel of his boot.

"That's called his scratch line," said Musgrave, who seemed to be enjoying his role as teacher. "Each fighter has to be able to come up to scratch for the next round or else he forfeits the match."

Mrs. Cooke nodded. She was completely engrossed in what was happening. The reporter, Charlesworth, was scribbling in his notebook.

Now Christopher beckoned the two fighters into the ring. Under the brilliant light, Murdoch had a better opportunity to assess each man. The Chopper was a good head taller than Lincoln and looked a lot heavier. He had wide, well-muscled shoulders and long arms. His legs, however, were spindly, and Murdoch wondered if he'd been a lumberjack. When he'd worked at the camp in Huntsville, he'd seen lots of men with similar physiques, all of the heavy work being done by the arms and shoulders. Lincoln was better proportioned, his leg muscles were well developed and his arms looked powerful. The skin of both men gleamed with oil, and both of them were clenching and unclenching their massive fists.

The referee pointed at Lincoln. "First call to the African," he said and tossed a coin in the air. Lincoln called out, "The Queen" in a loud voice. Christopher checked. "Her Majesty it is." There was a mixture of cheers and boos from the crowd.

"He'll take the north corner, or he's a fool," said the reporter in front of them. "The field slopes upward and when they tire it'll give him a bit of an advantage." He glanced over his shoulder. "And he needs all the advantages he can get. The Chopper outweighs him and outreaches him. In my opinion, the African doesn't stand a chance, even though, of the two of them, I'd say he has the most bottom."

Mrs. Cooke frowned and Musgrave interjected quickly. "That's a term the Fancy use for courage."

Lincoln looked at his brother, got the nod, and pointed to the north corner. This elicited another wave of jeers mingled with a few cheers from the crowd. He was not a favourite.

The fighters touched knuckles briefly and then went to their respective corners. Here each man's second was ready in position on one knee. Murdoch could see Elijah talking in

his brother's ear. Then he stood in front of him and held up his hands while Lincoln did a few warm-up punches into his palms. The Chopper seemed content to sit on his second's knee and have one of his entourage massage his shoulders.

"Gentlemen, your attention, please," called out the referee. "We are about to begin. Now, I shall remind you in case there are virgins here that this match will be run under the old rules." He shouted out the last two words and a roar of pleasure came from most of the spectators. Murdoch thought they were already acting as a mob, cheering or booing all together. Christopher held up his hands for silence. "I haven't finished yet. There will be thirty seconds between rounds; a drop will end the round and the fighter must go, or be taken, to his own corner. At the sound of the bell he must come up to the scratch line immediately or he will forfeit the fight. The winner will be determined by a knockout or by one of the boxers being unable to continue. In which case, his second must so indicate by throwing in his towel. Are we clear?"

"Yes! Get on with it! Stop blathering!" yelled a number of voices.

"There is one more thing before we let these men at each other, and they will be at each other, I promise you. This is a grudge match of unprecedented ferocity. The Chopper has defeated the African once and the African has in turn defeated the Chopper -"

"We know all that," shouted one man.

The referee scowled. "I should remind you that this boxing match is under my authority just as much as a courtroom is under the authority of the judge. I will not tolerate any brawling or any interfering with the fighters. That is why we have my capable constables."

He indicated the men who were patrolling the space in front of the spectators, and they all slapped their whips into their hands.

"I should also remind you I do not want to see any wagering going on. As we all know, Her Majesty's government has declared prize fighting and wagering to be illegal. And far be it for us to break the law. Right, gentlemen?"

A chorus of "Rights!" came from the crowd.

"Besides, you never know if there are narks among us. It wouldn't be the first time."

Murdoch felt his heart jump a beat. Had Musgrave laid a trap for him? The cabbie must have noticed.

"Don't be alarmed, Mr. Murdoch, nobody knows you're here, but there might be more than one of your previous nabs among this lot so you should keep muffled up."

Christopher continued. "So, we're all understood then? I don't want to see no money changing hands." He paused, "Mind you, I am unfortunately blind in one eye like the Great Admiral himself." He pointed to his right eye. "I don't always see what is going on."

There was a roar of laughter from the crowd. He turned to the Chopper. "Ready?"

The fighter nodded.

Then to Green. "You?"

Lincoln waved his fist in the air in assent.

"Seconds, ready? Timekeeper ready." The referee's voice was as strong and hoarse as a carnival barker's. "Gentlemen, let us begin. Come to the scratch line, if you please."

The flat-nosed timekeeper clanged the bell. The Chopper threw off the blanket that his handler had put around his shoulders and walked to the centre of the ring to take up his position, standing slightly sideways, his right leg foremost, left arm extended, right arm across his chest.

On the other side of the scratch line, Lincoln took the same stance. The two men began to circle each other. Green attacked first, throwing three jabs in rapid succession, then a hard swing to the side of the Chopper's head. He

caught him high on his nose and a spurt of blood flew out. The Chopper fell to the ground.

"First blood to the African," called Charlesworth. The timekeeper rang his bell.

"A fall," cried Elijah. He was echoed by some of Lincoln's supporters, but a rumble of disapproval came from the crowd.

Charlesworth scowled. "That wasn't a fall, he backed off and slipped on the grass."

"I don't know about that," said Musgrave. "He's looks a bit wobbly to me."

The Chopper's two handlers were out in a flash and hauled him up and took him to the corner. He sat down while the second flapped a towel in front of his face.

The timekeeper rang his bell and both men jumped up. The next bleeding went to the Chopper, who gave Lincoln a stinging blow to his eye.

"One on the peeper," called out Charlesworth.

Musgrave brought his head closer to Murdoch and started to whisper in his ear, "You know that quarrel I told you about? The one between Mr. Cooke and Elijah? I didn't tell you everything...didn't seem up to me. But I did hear more than I let on. Cooke wanted Green to make his brother take a drop and Elijah wouldn't hear of it. He's been grooming Linc for months now to be a champion."

"I see."

The cabbie's hot breath was on Murdoch's ear. "He was a fighter himself not so long ago. I saw him fight. He's got the killer instinct, if ever I saw it. They both do."

As if on cue, Lincoln stepped toward his opponent, forcing him into the ropes, and with a powerful swing caught him on the side of the neck. The Chopper staggered away and Lincoln followed, aiming jab after jab at the other man's torso, which was already showing ugly blotches. It was impossible to tell how much bruising Lincoln was receiving, but his left eyebrow was trickling with blood. The flurry had

got the crowd excited, but the Chopper was strong and he suddenly retaliated, throwing vicious punches, landing most of them. Lincoln's face began to puff up on one side, distorting it.

Murdoch scanned the crowd. The spectators were in deep shadow, but he could see there were five or six negroes standing silently together near the barn on the north side of the field. There was something in their stillness that spoke more than if they had been shouting like the rest of the crowd. From where he stood, he thought they were young. None was particularly small of stature.

"He's down!" the spectators gave vent as one voice.

The Chopper had managed to grab Lincoln by the throat with one hand while landing two hard jabs to the side of his head with the other. Finally, the Chopper released a huge swing and Lincoln fell to the ground, where he lay writhing.

A loud "Get up" burst from Mrs. Cooke. Elijah and the other second were in the ring helping Lincoln to his feet. They half-dragged him to the corner, sat him on the second's knee, and Elijah dumped a bucket of water over him, then sponged away the blood that was pouring down his face.

The bell clanged and the crowd quieted down. Both men came out slowly, but Lincoln pounced first.

"One to the snorter, the ruby flows," said Charlesworth as he scribbled frantically in his notebook. "Oh, the African has got this round easy. The Chopper is staggering."

Staggering he might be, but the round continued for almost thirty minutes, neither man giving quarter until the Chopper took a fall and the two men walked wearily to their corners.

The next two rounds were shorter, the Chopper taking both falls. It was now obvious that both men had taken dreadful punishment. Their hands were swollen and Lincoln's right arm seemed almost useless.

"He could have broken it on that last parry," said Charlesworth.

Round five had hardly begun when the Chopper threw out a swing, all the weight of his body behind it. He caught Lincoln high on the temple and he dropped like a felled ox and lay unmoving. The crowd was shrieking and calling at him, but Elijah and both seconds had to pull him by his feet to the corner.

"He's done," said the reporter, and Murdoch had to agree. Lincoln could hardly sit on his second's knee. His brother was holding him upright. One of his eyes was completely closed, the other almost so. The bell rang to mark the end of the round, and the Chopper advanced to the scratch line and took up his stance. Lincoln struggled to his feet, took one step forward, waving his arms in front of him as if trying to find his opponent. He staggered backward and leaned against the ropes, panting and spitting blood.

"Mr. Green," called the referee, "is your man up to scratch or not?"

Elijah spoke urgently to his brother, who shook his head and feebly pushed him away. He tried again to get to the line, but he was swaying too much. The Chopper walked toward him, his clenched fist at the ready, but before he could go any farther, Elijah grabbed the towel from the ropes and threw it down. They had forfeited the fight. The spectators began to shout, a mixture of cheers and catcalls. Murdoch could hear cries of "coward, cheaters." They wanted the fight to continue. The mood was ugly, and Murdoch felt alarm for the Green brothers and their entourage. All together, the fight had lasted about an hour and ten minutes. Not long enough, obviously.

"Damnation," said Charlesworth. "There goes my five dollars."

An ill-kempt, odorous man standing next to him said angrily, "That bloody darkie's a Miss Molly if you ask me. He didn't hardly put up a fight at all."

"I don't know about that," answered Murdoch. "He caught a good one from the Chopper. You could stop a train with a blow like that."

Another man beside him chimed in. "That's all right by me. I had a wager on the Chopper to win. Mind you, a scrap that don't last ain't worth a candle if you ask me."

"I thought you weren't supposed to bet. Didn't the referee say it's against the law?" said Murdoch.

The man released a spurt of tobacco on the grass. "I don't give a fart about that. I just hope my tout is going to pay up promptly. Everybody was betting against the African so he'll have to shell out a lot of dosh."

Musgrave tapped Murdoch on the arm. "I've got to have a quick chin with a pal of mine, I'll be right back. Excuse me, Mrs. Cooke, I'll escort you back to the carriage first. You have been a complete soldier, if I may put it that way, a complete soldier, but the situation might not be safe."

"Not at all."

To her credit, Mrs. Cooke didn't even pretend to be of a delicate sensibility. She had enjoyed herself.

Murdoch could see two men shoving at each other on the far side of the ring. Around them, angry men were waving their fists. It wouldn't take much to turn the whole event into a full-scale riot, he thought. Charlesworth had vanished into the fray. The Green brothers had left the ring, and Murdoch could see them forcing their way through the crowd toward the barn. Lincoln was still unsteady on his feet and the cloth he was holding to his eye was soaked with blood. The knot of negro men Murdoch had noticed earlier also shoved through and he saw them all disappear into the barn. The Chopper was submerged in a sea of well-wishers but he, too, looked groggy.

"Mr. Murdoch, I've changed my mind," said Mrs. Cooke. "I need time to consider what to do about Green. We can't throw out an unjustified accusation. I would prefer you didn't charge him at the moment."

“I’m not officially on duty, ma’am, and I’d be insane to try to make an arrest for illicit gambling in this crowd, and as for stealing one of your horses and a carriage, I don’t have any evidence at the moment. I will go and have a word with Green, however. Please don’t wait for me, ma’am. I’ll find my own way back.”

“Very well. Come and see me tomorrow and we can discuss how to proceed. No sense in being hasty, is there? We must forgive those who trespass against us, after all.”

She was singing a different tune now. Whatever had caused her to change her mind and had given her such a lively air, Murdoch suspected had little to do with Christian charity.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

As he pushed through the crowd, Murdoch had to sidestep a man who had lifted a boy, presumably his son, onto his shoulders. The lad could have been no more than seven or eight and his face was alive with excitement as he swung his fists in mock battle, his father urging him on. Murdoch had a sudden memory of his own father taking him to see a prize fight when he was about eleven. It was a paltry affair compared with this one and took place in a local farmer's field. Even to a young boy's eyes, the two fighters seemed ridiculously mismatched, one of them a strapping blacksmith's apprentice, the other a flabby, older man who had once been a champion. Harry had got them a place close to the ring, no beaters needed at this match. The ex-champion was canny and seasoned and at first that stood him in good stead, but after less than half an hour, the younger man's better conditioning began to show. He landed blow after blow on his opponent's face, closing both his eyes and causing his lips to puff out to twice their size. One blow landed square on the older man's nose and as his head jerked backward, the blood splattered over young Will's shoulders. Harry had laughed. "Got baptized, did you, son?" Murdoch couldn't bear to let his father see how close he was to retching and he wiped off the blood as stoically as he

could. The old champion's seconds didn't throw in the towel for another four or five rounds until the brawler's face was no longer recognizably human. Later, Murdoch asked his father if the man had died. "No, but the poor bastard won't be able to recognize his wife again," was the reply.

The bruiser who had served as Lincoln's other second blocked Murdoch's entrance to the barn.

"No visitors. Sorry, mister."

"I'm an acquaintance of Mr. Elijah Green. Tell him William Murdoch would like a word with him. He knows me."

The man eyed him suspiciously, but he backed off.

"Wait here."

In a few minutes, Green himself came to the entrance and stopped abruptly when he saw Murdoch. A few paces behind him was one of the young coloured men who had been standing aloof from the match, watching.

"Don't worry, Green. I'm not going to arrest you, I wouldn't be so foolish. I'm here unofficially."

Green grimaced. "I didn't think coppers were ever off duty if it suited them."

"Well, this one is. Is there somewhere we can talk in private?"

"I suppose so."

Green jerked his head in the direction of the man in his wake. "Jim, you stay on the gate. I'll be back in a minute. Follow me, Mr. Murdoch."

He led the way down the path. Fortunately, the crowd was drifting across the fields toward the carriages calmed by the fact that most of them had bet against Lincoln and had won their wager. A couple of men were taking down the chandelier and others were dismantling the ring.

They'd only gone a few feet when a man, thick-set, drunk and dirty, got in their path.

"Why'd you throw in the towel, Green? He could have gone on."

“Not in my opinion,” said Green calmly. “He didn’t hardly know his name.”

“Lost me a lot of money.”

“That ain’t my fault, O’Rourke. It was a fair fight.”

The fellow didn’t budge. “So you say.”

He was shorter than Green but much heavier and there was a menace to him that Murdoch didn’t like. He’d met the man before. He stepped forward.

“You heard him. I saw it too. The Chopper landed a good one.”

Murdoch still had his muffler around his face so maybe his voice didn’t come out as strongly as it might have. The Irishman glared at him.

“I’m talking to this nigra, not you, whoever you are. Keep your nose out of it.”

Murdoch pulled away the scarf. “As a matter of fact, I have a very long nose. And I’m sticking it into your business. As I recall, Judge Robinson said the next time you were booked for taking wagers he’d make sure you were given the opportunity to visit Kingston.”

O’Rourke stared at him, the light was dim, only one lamp was left hanging on the nearby post.

“You’re a copper, ain’t you?”

“That’s right. Murdoch’s the name. Now like I just said to Mr. Green, I’m here unofficially so I can’t take you into custody for uttering threats or for taking wagers illegally, much as I would like to. But if you don’t bugger off I might suddenly find my badge.”

The Irishman muttered under his breath, looked as if he was considering defiance, then retreated.

“I thank you, Mr. Murdoch,” said Green. “I’m not in any mood to deal with the likes of him.”

They continued on the path that led to the rear of the barn. Here was another lantern and Murdoch could see a tethered horse and a carriage with the familiar yellow C painted on the side.

Green opened the door. "Come into my office."

He climbed in and took a seat. Murdoch followed and sat across from him.

"What do you want to talk about, Mr. Murdoch? I can't stay long. I've got to get Linc home."

"I understand you're managing prize fighters."

Green looked weary. "I wonder who told you that? At a guess, I'd say it was Musgrave."

"Is that what you do in the barn when nobody's there? With the skipping rope? Very good exercise, that. And the Indian clubs."

"You've got to keep yourself fit in my line of work. Training's not illegal."

"But taking a horse and carriage without permission is. It's called theft."

Green smiled. "I had permission. Daniel Cooke gave that to me a couple of years ago. 'Take the carriage whenever you need, Elijah,' were his very words. Let's say it was a barter. He paid me next to nothing and in return I could have use of the horses as I needed. I have to travel around to find good venues and to see other fighters. I saw no reason not to pass on my opinions as to who might win to Mr. Cooke."

"Do you have that agreement in writing?"

"No. It was a gentleman's agreement."

"Did he come to the fights with you?"

Green sat back so that Murdoch could hardly make out his face. "Sometimes."

"Musgrave says he heard you quarrelling about one of the fights. Cooke wanted you to fix it so that your brother lost. Is that true?"

"If I say yes, I can be charged with running an illegal game. You might put your badge on. As it is, I'm claiming what you've seen is just one of many sports that gentlemen come to for pleasure. Nobody can say one way or the other, now can they?"

"Cooke's death could be convenient for you."

"The opposite, Mr. Murdoch," Green answered sharply. "First of all, who will believe he had given me permission about the carriages? Not his wife, I'm sure. If she knew I was here, she'd probably have me arrested."

"She does know. Musgrave brought her."

Green's shoulders sagged. "Is she charging me with theft?"

"Frankly, I don't know what she's going to do. She said she wanted to consider the matter."

Green stared at Murdoch. "Did she now? I wonder what that means? From what I know about the lady, it won't be good." He peered out of the window at the now-empty field.

"You can always leave," said Murdoch.

"Not now. She'll make sure I never work anywhere else. She's got me fast."

"It's my impression she won't stop you from the fights. Perhaps the opposite."

Green digested that. Neither possibility was a good one.

Murdoch didn't know if there was anything he could do about it. On the other hand, he might have a little leverage over Mrs. Cooke himself.

"Is that everything? I should see to Lincoln."

"In a minute. I'm curious about that paper Crabtree found in your box. The words have a different look to them now I've seen this fight. Were they really copy for your son?"

"Just that. I took some words from Mendoza's papers. He was a celebrated man of the ring, an excellent fighter. Lincoln and I have been studying him. My Donnie is interested in the old sport, so I thought I'd give him the words to learn. Believe me, it had nothing to do with plotting Mr. Cooke's death, as your constable suspected."

"And the bloody sacking?"

"Just what I said. I had to bleed Bendigo's abscess. Why waste good sacking?"

Gingerly, he touched the bump on his forehead. "Now this I was fabricating just a bit. The beam I said I walked into was Lincoln's fist when we were sparring." He shifted. "I must go now."

"Sorry, I'm not quite done. First, I wanted to let you know I was sorry about what happened to Thomas Talbert."

Green rubbed his hand over his face. "I'd almost put that out of mind with the fight happening, but I must say I was mighty shocked when I heard. Thom was nobody's enemy."

"At least one person's, I'm afraid."

"But he didn't have much money, I'm sure."

"It wasn't a robbery. There were banknotes dropped on his body, obviously deliberately. All small denominations amounting to forty dollars."

Murdoch was watching Green, but the man seemed genuinely bewildered. "What was the point of that? Oh no, don't tell me you're connecting it with some kind of wager?"

"Judas betrayed our Lord for forty pieces of silver. I was wondering if there was a message in that money. An indication of betrayal."

"You've lost me, detective. What sort of betrayal?"

"I don't know." Murdoch took his sketch out of his pocket and held it in front of the lantern. "After death, Mr. Talbert was tied into this position."

Green studied the drawing and Murdoch saw that tears had sprung to his eyes. "Was he, indeed? Such desecration to an innocent old man, I don't understand."

Murdoch replaced the sketch in his pocket. "Nor do I, at the moment. Was Mr. Talbert ever mixed up in placing bets on the fights?"

"No. He came to one about a year ago and said it made no sense to him to see two sane, healthy men who had no grudge with each other try to batter the other into raw meat."

Murdoch was of much the same opinion, but he didn't comment.

"I know Constable Burley already asked you this, but since you talked to him, has anything come to you? Any suspicions? Anything at all?"

Green shrugged. "If Cooke hadn't been done in first, I might have pointed the finger at him. There was some enmity between them. They didn't hardly see each other, mind, but sometimes Thom would drop a comment about Mr. Cooke that would have set light to straw and Mr. Cooke never seemed comfortable around him. I couldn't understand it. Another owner would have got rid of Thom, I suppose, but Mr. Cooke kept him on. He wasn't even that good a worker any more. I often had to do his job over again."

They heard somebody calling. "Murdoch, where the hell are you?"

Murdoch looked out of the window. Musgrave, swinging a lamp, was walking around the field.

"You'd better see to your brother," he said to Green. "If he's not back to his normal self tomorrow, I want you to take him to a physician I know, a Dr. Ogden on Gerrard Street. I'll speak to her. She won't ask difficult questions."

"Thanks, but he'll be all right. He's tough as shoe leather. It's all part of the game. Next time, he'll learn to be more careful. The Chopper just got in a lucky blow." He hesitated. "What are you going to do? Are you going to arrest me?"

"That's the second time you've asked me that. I'm starting to think you're hankering after the good cooking in the Don Jail."

Green managed a grin. "Not likely."

"No, I'm not going to arrest you. I'm not here officially, as I said. It all looked like good clean fun for gentlemen to enjoy to me. I didn't see any money changing hands."

Green offered his hand. "Thank you. If I can return the favour sometime I will."

"You can help me get back to the city. I don't fancy an hour in the carriage with Mrs. Cooke."

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

The small church was filled to capacity, but there were only two white people in the congregation, Mrs. Stokely and Murdoch. For the first time in his life, Murdoch was conscious of being physically different from everybody around him. Growing up as a Catholic in a Nova Scotian village that was overwhelmingly Methodist had introduced him early on to prejudice and discrimination, but until somebody knew about his faith, he at least appeared to be like everybody else he met and was treated accordingly.

He had decided to go to the Sunday service at the Baptist Church on Queen Street, and on the way he had met Mrs. Stokely. She was touchingly glad to see him, but she looked wretched, wrung out by grief.

"We can't have a funeral until after the inquest, but Pastor Laing will say some words of tribute today," she said. "I'm sure Thom would have appreciated you coming, Mr. Murdoch."

Murdoch felt uncomfortable. He hadn't come from any fondness for Talbert, although he'd liked him. He came because he wanted to know more about the coloured residents of the city and he knew this was where most of them came to worship. He offered Mrs. Stokely his arm and they entered the church together. They were met at the

door by Elijah Green, who was acting as an usher. He greeted Mrs. Stokely warmly and nodded at Murdoch in a cool, polite way. What had happened last night was in another life.

“Good morning, Mr. Murdoch.”

“How’s Lincoln?” Murdoch asked him quietly.

“He’s recovering just fine but having a bit of rest today. Will you come this way, please?”

He led them down the aisle to a pew near the centre.

Murdoch had been about to make his habitual genuflection to the altar as he entered the pew but stopped himself just in time. He had no idea how the Baptists would feel about such outlandish Papist practices, but he felt peculiar not doing it and not crossing himself, as if he were being disrespectful to God. He cringed at how well he’d been indoctrinated. Mrs. Stokely had slid in next to a plump, matronly woman who was exquisitely dressed in a bright blue taffeta walking suit with a matching flower-bedecked hat.

“My dear, please accept my condolences. I’m sure Thomas Talbert was the best of employers.”

She was being kind, of course, but Mrs. Stokely was being given the status of housekeeper, not wife as she deserved.

“Yes, he was,” murmured Mrs. Stokely. She was dressed in mourning clothes, but she’d been careful not to overdo it. Her plain black hat was unveiled and her suit a navy wool. Murdoch wondered if she would ever reveal the true nature of her relationship with Talbert.

“Such a terrible tragedy,” the matron continued. “He will be sorely missed by this church. I know Pastor Laing is awful upset by it.” She shook her head. “The Lord sometimes sees fit to take those he loves before their time. It is not for us to question His mysterious ways, is it?”

She leaned forward and included Murdoch in her words. He nodded noncommittally but felt like a hypocrite. There

had been many times when he questioned why a supposedly loving God would inflict such misery on the human race for no good reason that he could fathom. When Liza died, Murdoch's faith had been seriously shaken, and so far no priest nor his own prayers had completely restored it.

A woman in front of them turned and also offered condolences to Mrs. Stokely, and they entered into a soft conversation that had to do with the woman's recollections of Talbert's piety.

Unlike the sombre, supposedly reverent silence of Catholic worshippers, this congregation were happily chatting among themselves. A pleasant smell of violets wafted over to him. Everybody was in their Sunday best, gaily decorated hats for the women and well-brushed, sombre suits for the men. On any Sunday morning that was true, of course, of all worshippers across the city, no matter what the church. Murdoch himself was wearing his good houndstooth jacket and fairly new worsted trousers, and he'd spent ten minutes polishing his boots. He should have been attending mass himself but had used the investigation to ease his conscience about skipping. Not that he'd gone last week either or the week before, but he'd deal with that later when he met Father Fair.

Murdoch glanced around. It wasn't the only Protestant church he'd ever been inside, but it was the first Baptist one. The straight-backed pews were oaken and the windows filtered light through pastel-hued stained glass. There were no gilded columns, no statues, no ornate carvings on the ceiling, as there were in his own church of St. Paul's. At the front of the church was a raised platform and a vibrant painting of Jesus at prayer. Below the painting, two curtains framed an alcove, rather like a stage, which displayed another picture, this one of a river. To Murdoch's left was a pulpit with a cross in front of it, the kind he'd once heard a child call a "naked cross," because there was no figure of the suffering Jesus nailed to it.

He was curious about the Baptist service. Not too long ago, he'd been smitten with Mrs. Enid Jones, a young widow who had been sharing his lodgings. She was a Baptist, and every Sunday she went off to her church and he to his. He had come close to proposing marriage but had not done so, for complicated reasons he himself didn't completely understand. Perhaps he just wasn't ready to let go once and for all of his attachment to Liza. If that was so, it wasn't the case any longer now that he had fallen in love with Amy Slade.

He felt a timid touch on his arm.

"Are you all right, Mr. Murdoch?"

"Yes, yes, quite all right, thank you, Mrs. Stokely."

"I just wondered. You seem cast down."

He was saved from a reply by a newcomer entering the pew. Murdoch slid over to give the woman room, then realized with a jolt of surprise it was none other than Faith. She of the no surname.

He tipped his hat to her.

"Good morning, ma'am."

She nodded a greeting and sat down.

"Are you here for the memorial to Thomas Talbert?" he asked.

Her eyes flickered at him. "Is there one? As you've been told already, we didn't know the gentleman. I'm here because I never miss church meeting if I can help it, even when I'm in a strange city."

"How is Mrs. Dittman?"

"Not too well this morning. She had a bad night."

"I'm sorry to hear it."

She turned and looked at him straight in the eyes. "'Twas your visit what contributed to her going down."

Her anger was palpable, but before he could respond, a door at the back of the church opened and the pastor entered. He was tall and thin, younger than Murdoch had expected, dressed in a black suit but no vestments. The

organist, who was tucked away out of sight to the side, hit some chords and right behind the pastor came a choir singing loudly and vigorously. Murdoch looked around quickly to see what the ritual was and stood up with the rest of the congregation while the singers filed into place on each side of the altar. All around him, people were clapping their hands in harmony with the hymn that was unfamiliar to him but so lively in tempo he almost started clapping too. After two or three verses, the hymn ended and everybody sat down. The pastor held up his hands. "Hallelujah. The Lord is our Saviour."

"Amen, amen," chorused various members of the congregation. Faith spoke particularly loudly.

"My dear friends in Christ," said the pastor. "Welcome to you all. We have many prayers to request this morning. Mrs. Mabel Forester is not well, suffering bad in her legs and she asks for your prayers."

"Praise the Lord, Jesus saves."

"Our good friend Charles Compton is in sore need of employment and asks for your prayers that he might find work that will help him support his family in the knowledge and love of our Saviour Jesus Christ."

"Amen, Lord."

"But, particularly, this glorious morning, I must ask for your prayers for our dear brother, Thomas Talbert, who has been so cruelly snatched from the world."

Somebody in the congregation sobbed.

Reverend Laing raised his voice. "The Lord shall smite down our enemies yea even as they hurt and revile us. We are in Jesus' hands and he loves us, every child, every man, every woman, no matter how black with sins our souls have become, the blood of Jesus will wash us clean and on the Day of Judgment we will stand before him and if we have taken him into our hearts, our souls will be as clean as the driven snow."

His speech was punctuated by startlingly loud, sporadic cries of "Amen," "Yes, Lord," and "That's right!" from the congregation.

The pastor retired to a chair beside the pulpit and the organist began to play. One woman stood up in the midst of the choir and began to sing. This time it was a hymn Murdoch had heard before. Her voice was so beautiful, it made the hairs on the back of his neck prickle.

Nearer my God to thee...

*Tho' like a wanderer,
The sun goes down,
Darkness be over me,
My rest a stone.*

When she had finished, there was a moment of appreciative silence among the congregation, then the pastor launched into an impassioned prayer that went on for a long time and was often overwhelmed by exhortations from his flock.

Finally, he concluded and faced the congregation, stretching out his arms.

"Welcome, dear sisters and brethren in Jesus. I see that we have some visitors here today. Will you be so good as to stand, tell us your name and where you're from."

Almost as one, the congregation turned to look at Murdoch and Faith. She actually smiled and stood up.

"Thank you, pastor. I am Faith and I usually reside in New York City."

There was a muttering of "Welcome, Sister Faith," "Good news," and she sat down again. Murdoch felt a gentle prod in his side from Mrs. Stokely and he had no choice but to stand.

"My name is William Murdoch and I live here in Toronto."

As with Faith, there was a chorus of “welcomes” and he could see friendly smiles all around him. He spotted Elijah Green sitting in the front pew, his wife and children beside him. None of them was smiling.

The pastor spoke again. “Welcome to you both. Now brothers and sisters, let us show our visitors what sort of welcome our church puts out for any of those who come to our doors. Remember our Lord, who said, ‘I was a stranger and you took me in.’”

“That’s right! Amen. Yes, Lord.”

Murdoch sat back down, but all around him people were standing up and shaking hands with one another. On each side, his neighbours, including Mrs. Stokely, reached out their hands to him and Faith. In the melee, however, she avoided shaking hands with him. Finally, the hubbub subsided, although Murdoch would have sworn almost everybody in the congregation had come over and greeted him.

The pastor raised his arms again. “The deacons will come among you with plates. Do not hesitate to offer whatever you are able to. Remember the widow’s mite, which was acceptable to our Lord.”

Murdoch was glad he had a dollar left in his wallet and he placed it on the silver plate that was passed along the row. Faith put on a five-dollar bill. That done, the pastor stood again at the podium. “Thanks to our brother, Councillor Hubbard, we have sufficient hymn books now to go around. Whether you can use them or not, let us raise up our voices and sing out joyfully, ‘What a Wonderful Saviour Is Jesus my Lord.’”

Mrs. Stokely leaned to Murdoch. “That’s hymn number fifty-three.”

The woman in front turned, holding out her hymnal. “Here, take mine.”

Murdoch accepted the offer. There was more prayer, more singing, another offering to which he could only

contribute fifty cents, and it was time for the pastor to give his sermon. A rustling of taffeta skirts, little clearings of throat, and soft “Amen, Lords” as he went to the podium. The congregation settled in.

Pastor Laing’s message was simple: Turn the other cheek to those that hurt and abuse you. Murdoch had heard many a variation of this and had long ago dismissed it as an impossible text, noble in theory, but impossible in a real world permeated with injustice and violence. Nevertheless, as he sat in the midst of people whose lives he knew were not so long ago racked with terrible hurt and abuse, he was moved in a way he had not been in a long time. There seemed to be no rage or indignation in the pastor’s voice but no servility either. This was what the Lord Jesus taught, and he was going to live by it. Murdoch watched Elijah, head bent, apparently intent on what was being said.

The pastor concluded his sermon and Murdoch heard a particularly loud “Praise the Lord’s word” from Faith. Mrs. Stokely was quiet, and Murdoch wasn’t sure how much she was actually listening.

“Let us leave today by singing together a hymn that I know was a particular favourite of Thomas’s. His voice ringing out for the Lord is forever in my heart.”

“Amen. Amen. That’s right.”

The choir stood up and launched into a song that quickly had everybody on their feet, clapping and swaying together.

“Oh! Oh! Oh! What He’s done for me.”

This was repeated three times and followed by “I never shall forget what He’s done for me.”

In spite of an initial self-consciousness, Murdoch was soon moving to the rhythm with everybody else. Faith was singing and swaying enthusiastically beside him. She had a lovely, vibrant voice and he would have complimented her afterwards if he hadn’t thought she would spit in his face.

The song ended.

“Go in peace,” said the pastor, hands uplifted. Released, the congregation burst into chatter. Mrs. Stokely shook hands with the woman beside her, and the woman in the front pew who had lent her hymn book turned to Murdoch with her hand outstretched.

“The Lord bless you,” she said.

He wasn’t quite sure what the correct response was, but he mumbled, “And the Lord bless you too.”

Faith left immediately without acknowledging him or anyone else. Murdoch escorted Mrs. Stokely outside. The pastor was on the steps, greeting his congregation. When it came to Murdoch’s turn, he gave him a warm smile.

“Welcome in Jesus’ name, sir.”

“Thank you,” said Murdoch awkwardly. “I apologize for intruding on a place of worship, but I am actually a police officer. I am investigating the death of Thomas Talbert, and I wonder if I might have a word with you?”

The pastor showed no surprise and Murdoch suspected that the entire congregation knew from the moment he walked into the church who he was.

“Will you come back at a later time, Mr. Murdoch? I must finish my duties, but I will be happy to speak to you if it will in any way facilitate your inquiries. Thomas was a most valued member of our church.”

His words were cordial enough, but once again Murdoch could sense his wariness. He was getting accustomed to it. The police asking for a word about a murder case usually didn’t bode well for a coloured man, even a man of God.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

Murdoch spent the rest of the afternoon alone. Charlie was on duty and Katie had taken the twins to the Toronto Islands for the day. Amy was visiting one of her students who was ill, she feared with the consumption. In the late afternoon, feeling restless, he decided to drop in at the station to see if any of the constables had come up with new information. Then, on impulse, he turned along Queen Street to St. Paul's Church. He had been in another church this morning, an apostate one, and even though it was a visit conducted in the line of duty, as it were, he knew Father Fair would assign him a penance if he heard about it. Not that he was looking for absolution, but something drew him to St. Paul's, some need he could hardly articulate.

As he was arriving, a flock of birds swooped around the bell tower, twittering frantically, and landed in the big maple tree that grew in the front yard. The din continued as Murdoch walked up the steps. The light was growing softer as the day began to wane and he was finding it hard to shake off his mood. He'd dealt with other cases before that were soaked with tears, cases where people of blameless lives had been murdered, but this latest death had affected him. Talbert was an old man and had surely not deserved to

be killed violently and certainly not to have his body treated with such indignity.

Murdoch pushed open the heavy oaken doors and entered into the vestibule where the smell of incense from morning mass hung in the air. A bank of votive candles flickered, and a woman was kneeling at the prayer rail. Whatever she was saying a novena for absorbed her completely, and she didn't glance up when Murdoch took up a taper and lit a candle. He, too, dropped to his knees. *Dear Lord, I ask your prayers for the soul of Thomas Talbert. May he be with you in eternity. I ask this in Jesus Christ's name. Amen.*

There were so many candles burning they were giving off heat. He regarded them for a moment, each tiny flame representing a plea to Almighty God to intercede or perhaps to give thanks for a prayer heard. He crossed himself and got to his feet. The woman didn't stir. Her rosary was threaded through her fingers and he could see her lips moving silently. Her face was careworn and her clothes shabby. There was something about her that reminded him of his mother, perhaps the desperation with which she told her beads. He'd seen his mother do that many a time, trying to find solace in her faith, and he remembered how intense his own feelings were, a mix of anger and helplessness. Anger at the source of her unhappiness, his father, and helplessness because he was too young to do anything about it. As he found himself doing so often, Murdoch wondered where Harry was.

He reached for a taper, dropped a nickel in the box, and lit another candle. He didn't kneel this time but said quietly, "Help me to find forgiveness in my heart, Lord, for those I perceive as having wronged me and those I loved."

The candle flame danced in its red dish, as if it were mocking him.

As soon as he walked into the station hall, Murdoch knew something had happened. Charlie Seymour and a young constable third class, the stenographer, Bobbie McCarthy, were the two officers on duty. Charlie greeted him. His face was alive with humour as if he'd just been exchanging a joke with McCarthy.

"You look like the cat that got the canary," Murdoch said to him.

"I feel as if I ate a pigeon, not the canary," Charlie replied. "You will too when you see who's here." He grinned. "Go down to your office. He's waiting for you. Oh just a minute, there's also a letter come for you. Don't ask me who from because I don't know, some urchin brought it in then took off like a rabbit seeing a fox. It must have been the sight of McCarthy here."

The stenographer laughed, not minding the teasing that was often directed at him. He was a country boy, apple-cheeked, hardly a frightening figure even to the half-wild boys of the city poor, who were ever wary of the frogs.

"Who's waiting for me?" Murdoch asked Charlie.

"It's a surprise. Go on. He's been here at least half an hour."

Murdoch put the envelope in his pocket and went through the rear door to his cubicle. He pushed aside the reed curtain. At his desk, leaning back comfortably in his chair, arms behind his head, was Inspector Brackenreid.

"Murdoch! Come in."

"Well, I, er..."

Brackenreid stood up. He was not in uniform but was wearing a fawn suit that anticipated summer. He had put a stylish bowler on the desk.

"Do you want your chair?"

"No, that's all right, sir. I'll sit here."

He took the sagging chair that served for visitors.

"I couldn't wait to get back to the station, Murdoch. I think I surprised our duty sergeant out of a year's growth."

He frowned in the old, familiar way that was something of a relief. "A bit much, if you ask me, I'm not exactly Lazarus returned from the dead."

"No, sir, I suppose he wasn't used to seeing you out of uniform." *Or in such a jovial mood.* "How are you feeling, sir?"

"Good. Better than I've felt in years." He patted his pocket. "Don't happen to have a cigar, do you, Murdoch? I could do with a smoke."

"No, sir. I'm sorry, I don't."

Brackenreid pulled open the desk drawer. "Yes, you do, you rascal. Here's a box of the best Cuban." He placed the box on the top of the desk and chuckled. "I thought the least I could do was treat you to a cigar, Murdoch, considering I owe you my life."

Murdoch thought the inspector must still be in the grip of the lingering effects of inebriation. "Not exactly that, sir."

"As good as." He took one of the cigars, took a pair of cigar cutters from his pocket, and snipped off the end.

"The matches are in the other drawer," said Murdoch.

Brackenreid lit up and enjoyed a luxurious draw of smoke.

"Good Lord, Murdoch, I almost forgot to offer you one. They are for you, after all."

"I won't at the moment, thank you, sir, but please help yourself."

The inspector waved his cigar tip. "You could do with a new office, Murdoch. This isn't fit for a broom closet."

Murdoch winced. Small and unlovely as his cubicle was, it had served him well for a long time.

"What I've been thinking is that the room next to mine just down the hall would be a more suitable space for one of my most promising officers. At the moment, there's nothing in it but an old filing cabinet, a couple of broken chairs, and a table with three legs. What do you say if we moved all that stuff out and fitted the room up as your office?"

"Well, sir...I don't know what to say."

"Good, it's done then. You might as well keep this desk, but we'll get you a couple of better chairs and a decent cabinet." He grinned at Murdoch. "The room could do with a coat of paint to liven it up. I'll order work to start right away. But you'll have to promise me you won't draw your damn maps on the wall."

Bob Cratchett must have had similar mixed feelings when Scrooge went through his metamorphosis, thought Murdoch. Brackenreid was positively beaming at him.

"Thank you, sir. That is very generous, but really I'm so used to this space by now, it serves me very well." *And it's far away from your office.*

The inspector was not to be denied, however. "Nonsense. I'll order everything tomorrow." Suddenly the rather ridiculous air of conviviality dropped away. "I am trusting to your discretion, Murdoch, about what happened at the spa. My wife was most upset that I had left, but she is willing to see how I do, as she put it. I have to stay sober or I won't have a place to hang my hat any more. So I'm counting on you, William. If you see any signs whatsoever that I am backsliding, I want you to pull me up short. No matter what I say or however much I fight you, you must tell me the truth."

Murdoch groaned inwardly. It was not a responsibility he relished, but all he could do was to agree.

"Would you put that in writing, sir?"

"What? Oh you're poking fun at me. But I will, if you insist."

"No, sir. I was joking. Perhaps we could shake hands on it as gentlemen though. No matter what you say, if I deem it necessary, I will speak out what's on my mind."

"Only if you see me backsliding, Murdoch. Not about everything."

"Quite, sir. Another joke."

Brackenreid knocked the ash off his cigar. "I must be going. If I'm a minute later than I said I'd be, Mary will be in hysterics. I'll be in tomorrow, Murdoch, and then I'd like to be briefed on what's been happening here. You look as if you are in the middle of a case."

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me tomorrow then. You will have my full attention."

As that was an experience Murdoch had not had professionally for a long time, he merely nodded. This new inspector was going to take some getting used to.

After Brackenreid left, the reed curtain snapping and cracking behind him, Murdoch went around the desk and sat in his usual chair. He pulled open both drawers in case the inspector had left other gifts, but the cigars were it. Then he remembered the letter that Seymour had handed to him and he took it out of his pocket.

Dear Mr. Murdoch. I am in dire need of your help. Will you please meet me in the stables this evening at six o'clock sharp. This must be in strict confidentiality. I have in return some information to impart concerning the death of Thomas Talbert, which you will find very helpful. Please do not fail me.

Yours, Adelaide Cooke.

Murdoch pulled out his pocket watch. Damn. It was almost six. He had five minutes to get to the appointment. He wondered what it was she needed. His sense of Mrs. Cooke was that, whatever it was, she wanted it immediately and it didn't matter whether it was convenient for anybody else.

CHAPTER FORTY

Just as he was about to jump on his wheel, Murdoch discovered he had a flat tire. He didn't have time to repair it, so he left the bicycle and jogged as fast as he could over to Mutual Street. It was ten minutes past six when he got there and the stables were in darkness. Damn. Had she left?

He tried the side gate, which yielded to his push. It was unlocked. He crossed the courtyard. Dusk was falling rapidly, but there was just sufficient light remaining that he could make his way to the barn. As he approached, he could see the door was slightly open and could hear a soft nicker from one of the horses. He wished he had his bicycle lamp with him and he cursed himself that he hadn't brought a truncheon or even a revolver. He'd rushed out of the station, completely accepting that the note was from Adelaide Cooke, but what if it wasn't? Now as he tried to look into the darkness of the barn, he could almost hear Amy's voice chastising him. *It doesn't take manly muscle to fire a gun, you know.*

"Hello," he called. "Mrs. Cooke? It's Detective Murdoch here."

There was no answer except the stamp of a horse's hoof and the chink of a bridle.

He pushed open the door all the way, standing to one side so he could not be a target if anybody inside had that intention. Nothing happened. He stepped across the threshold and again quickly moved away to the side. Again nothing.

"Hello, anybody here?"

"Over here," said a hoarse, barely audible voice. He couldn't tell if the speaker was a man or a woman, and he could see nobody.

The voice had seemed to come from one of the stalls at the end of the row. He took a couple of steps forward, straining to see.

"Are you alone?" the voice asked.

"Yes, I am. I was expecting to meet Mrs. Cooke."

"You won't be. I was the one who sent you the note. I took the liberty of using her name."

"And who are you?"

"Never mind. You don't need to know. You're late, I thought you weren't coming."

Murdoch was about to apologize as if he had committed a social indiscretion, but he stopped himself. The situation was absurd. His neck was prickling at the back and he could feel the tension in his gut. He shifted his weight slightly forward. The unseen speaker had an advantage over Murdoch as his eyes had not yet adjusted to the darkness.

"The letter asked for my help and in return I would receive information about the death of Thomas Talbert. Is that true?"

"More or less."

Murdoch peered into the dark, trying to make out if there was more than one person hiding there. "Will you come out into the open? It is difficult to talk to somebody that I can't see."

"Don't be so impatient. We have all evening."

Murdoch had pinpointed the location of the voice by now. The speaker was in the far stall, but the mare didn't

seem perturbed and was placidly munching on the hay in her manger. Whoever it was had no fear of horses and must be crouched down and peering through a slit in the stall wall.

The voice came again, more conciliatory. "Mr. Murdoch, I do thank you for coming, but I need assurance that you are to be trusted. I would like you to come farther into the barn. There is a stool in the alley. Please sit down, facing the door."

The voice was still hoarse and low and the words were pronounced with almost an English accent and a peculiar preciseness that sounded artificial. He hesitated. He supposed he could run out of the barn and go for help, but he would probably lose the chance to question his shy informant if he did that. Besides, he was more and more convinced he was talking to a woman.

"How do I know *I* can trust *you*?" he asked.

"Regrettably, you don't know. You'll have to take that chance. As I said in my letter, perhaps we can help each other. Do you want to or not? If not, please leave. If you do, please take the stool."

Murdoch walked cautiously forward and almost banged into the stool. He sat on it as instructed, facing the open door.

He was attacked so suddenly and violently he was taken completely off guard.

A heavy cloth bag was dropped over his head from behind and pulled so tight he was almost choked. At the same time, something hard hit him on the back of his head and he fell face down on the stones. He must have lost consciousness for precious seconds because when he came to, his wrists were tied tightly together in front of him with some thin cord that bit into his flesh.

Something was jammed hard against his neck just beneath his ear.

"This is a gun. I did not come here with the intention of shooting you, but if I have to I will. Don't struggle. Now sit up and bring your knees to your chest."

The string at the neck of the bag was pulled tight, jerking him up. He had no choice but to obey, and in a moment his assailant had bound his ankles. The pressure of the gun at his jaw didn't relax.

"Come into a crouch position."

He was slow to move and there was a sharp blow to the back of his head that made him want to retch. He forced himself not to.

"Don't try to be brave, Mr. Murdoch, it really isn't worth it."

Then the gun was removed and a stick of some kind was thrust underneath his knees and over his elbows, forcing him into a painfully tight ball. It was the same position in which he'd found Talbert. This time he couldn't stop himself from gagging, and there was a fumble at his neck and he felt the cords of the bag loosen slightly.

"What do you want?" Murdoch managed to say, although the bag was still so tight against his nose, he could hardly breathe. He realized it was a horse's nose bag. He could see nothing but blackness. "You said you don't intend to shoot me, why are you tying me up then?"

"What did you say, Mr. Murdoch, I can hardly hear you?"

The mockery in the voice filled Murdoch with a rush of rage that overrode his initial fear, but he also knew his best chance to survive was to keep a cool head.

"I asked why you have tied me up in this way."

"A lesson, shall we say?"

Murdoch tried to free his mouth so he could speak with more force. "I don't know who you are. Surely I'd learn a better lesson if I knew what I had done wrong."

"It is not only the guilty who have to suffer, Mr. Murdoch. How much easier life would be if that were only the case."

"You said you needed my help. Is that true?"

"Alas, no. Not in the least. I thought an appeal to your chivalry would get you here quickly and, you see, I was correct about that."

Murdoch coughed violently as some of the dust from the bag went down his throat. Again there was a fiddling at his neck and the heavy bag was pulled away so he could breathe more easily. He would have given his soul for some water, and it was his voice now that was raspy.

"Are you the one responsible for the deaths of Cooke and Talbert?"

"In the strict meaning of the word, I suppose I am, but in truth, they were responsible for their own end."

"You were getting revenge, then?"

He felt another slap to the side of his head, not quite as hard as previously but still jolting.

"I've answered enough questions." The appalling voice came close to his ear. "I have punished two, I have one more to find." There was an odd, chilling chuckle. "What God joined should not have been. First, the father, then the son, and last the holy one and we are done. Somebody will discover you eventually, Mr. Murdoch, police officer. Every minute will be an increasing agony to you, but you won't know just how long you will have to stay like this. It will seem like eternity. However, you, sir, unlike many other unfortunates, can assume that when you are rescued you will be safe from further harm. Those who release you will not hurt you and you will be set free. That should be a comforting thought."

There was another tap to his head, then Murdoch sensed that his attacker had moved away. He heard the door close.

He twisted in the bag so he could relieve the pressure from his nose and was able to gain some space. His head had started to throb from the blows he'd received and he had to fight back waves of nausea.

“Help! Somebody help me!”

He knew how muffled his cries would be and stopped. Perhaps he could wriggle himself somehow over to the door. But which direction was the door? He could see nothing. Nevertheless, action was better than inaction and he rolled onto his side and started an agonizing sideways slither. It was excruciatingly slow and he didn't get far when his head banged into a stall partition. He heard the horse snuffle and stamp its foot. He lay still. All he needed was to end up close to a horse's hooves and he'd risk a good chance of being kicked to death. He tried to reverse directions but had no sense whatever of where he had come from. The pull on his legs and the pressure of the stick was becoming more and more painful.

Every minute will be an increasing agony to you, but you won't know just how long you will have to lie like this. It will seem like eternity.

“Help!” He shouted again. “Help!”

What time was it? He must have arrived in the barn less than half an hour ago. He knew no cabbies would come until tomorrow morning, but when did Elijah Green arrive to tend to the horses? Surely he'd be here before too long?

Unless he had a good reason for not doing his chores tonight.

Once again Murdoch tried to move, but the more he did, the more everything hurt. Finally, panting, he lay still and waited.

However, you, sir, unlike many other unfortunates, can assume that when you are rescued you will be safe from further harm. Those who release you will not hurt you and you will be set free. That should be a comforting thought.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

He had lost all sense of time, but he thought he'd been lying like this for more than two hours. The cord had been tied very tightly around his wrists and ankles and they were throbbing, but the worst agony was from the pressure of the stick against the back of his knees and his elbows. He found that by rocking forward onto his toes he was able to alleviate some of the strain on the back of his legs, but he couldn't sustain that for long periods. To make matters worse, he was finding it increasingly hard to get enough air inside the bag. The material was a heavy linen and was barely porous enough for him to breathe. Flies crawled across his exposed hands and he was powerless to shoo them away. He was also aware of an increasingly urgent need to void his bladder. Unbidden, Professor Broske's words came back to him, insinuating themselves into this brain.

Let us remember that fear is a disease to be cured. The brave man may fail sometimes, but the coward always fails.

At first, he had forced himself to concentrate, trying to work out who had attacked him – somebody who knew him, knew where to find him, who had even winkled out a truth about his character. A man or a woman? He still wasn't sure. These thoughts went round and round in his brain for a

while, but before too long the agony took over everything. He began to despair that no one would discover him before morning.

Suddenly, he heard the door open.

He shouted as loud as he could. "Help! Over here!"

He hoped to God it wasn't his attacker returned to torment him some more.

There were footsteps, the sound of boots on the flagstones. Suddenly there were hands at the back of his neck and the bag was jerked off his head. The stick was pulled away.

Murdoch gasped and gulped. Oh, blessed sweet air.

His eyes were dazzled by the light of a hurricane lamp that was on the ground beside him, but he could just make out the worried face of Elijah Green.

"Who did this to you, Mr. Murdoch?"

"I didn't see." He could hardly speak. "Whoever it was came from behind and took me by surprise."

"Let me get that rope off. Sorry, this will hurt a little. The cord is tight."

He removed a knife from a sheath at his belt and forced it in between Murdoch's swollen wrists, nicking the skin as he did so. The rope fell off and he did the same with the cord at the ankles. Murdoch licked his dry lips.

"I'll get you some water."

"No, wait. I've got to piss first."

Green grabbed a pail from a nearby bench.

"Use this. Can you stand?"

Murdoch tried to straighten up, but there was no circulation in his legs and he was weak as a babe.

"I'll hold you," said Green.

"No! I can do it myself. Just give me something to lean against."

Green dragged a bail of hay in closer, but Murdoch couldn't stand and his hands had gone numb. He had no choice but to accept the offer of help.

When he was done, Elijah lowered him gently to the ground, then he lit the big hurricane lamp that was hanging from a hook on the beam. "I'll be back in a tick."

As sensation returned to his limbs, Murdoch's entire body felt on fire. Cautiously he tried to straighten his legs, but they felt as if they no longer belonged to him. Elijah was back at his side almost immediately. In one hand he had a tin mug, in the other a brown bottle.

"This first." He handed the mug to Murdoch, who gulped the cool water. "Now drink this, but slower." He poured some liquid from the bottle into the mug.

Murdoch took a sip and some burning fluid slid down his throat, causing him to cough. Tears came to his eyes.

Green guided the mug to Murdoch's lips as if he were an invalid. "It's not the best brandy money can buy, but it should do the trick. Take another sip."

Murdoch did so and the second and third swallows were easier. The warmth from the liquor spread quickly through his body.

"Good, you're starting to look alive again. I wasn't sure for a minute there."

Murdoch grabbed hold of Elijah's wrist.

"You're late, aren't you? Don't you do your chores earlier than this?"

Green stared at him. "We were celebrating with my son. It was his birthday."

Holding the man this tightly was shooting pain up Murdoch's arm, but he didn't let go.

"How do I know you weren't the one who attacked me? It's an old trick. You pretend to leave, then wait a while and come back as if you're just coming in to work."

In the shadowy light of the lamp, Green's face was almost hidden so that Murdoch couldn't see his expression, but he didn't struggle or try to get away. Murdoch tightened his grip and felt the other man wince.

“Whisper at me. Say, ‘Somebody will discover you eventually, Mr. Murdoch.’ Go on say it! ‘Somebody will discover you eventually.’”

Green started to repeat the words, “Somebody will discover –”

“No! I said *whisper* . Like this.” Murdoch imitated his assailant’s hoarse voice. Green tried again. There was no resemblance to the voice Murdoch had heard and he released Green’s arm. Besides, his sense was that his attacker wasn’t the same size as Green. Whoever had attacked him was very strong but smaller. The voice had consistently hovered just above Murdoch’s head level.

“All right, I believe you.”

Green let out his breath. “I’m glad to hear it, Mr. Murdoch, because I had nothing to do with tying you up.”

Murdoch struggled to get to his feet, but his legs still couldn’t hold him and he staggered. Green caught him.

“I think you should sit a bit longer.”

“No. I’ve got to move. Whoever it was attacked me said he still had one more person to get.”

“Did he tell you who?”

“No.”

“Then better to hold off for a while. Frankly, sir, you’re not fit to help anybody at the moment.” He was right. Murdoch sat down on the bale of hay.

Green peered into his face. “You’ve got quite a goose egg over your eye. Did he hit you?”

“Not there. I fell forward and met with the flagstones.”

Green stood up and took a round tin from the nearby shelf. Murdoch noticed it had a picture of a horse on it and there was a whiff of a strong-smelling ointment when he opened it.

“This’ll sting for a second or two,” said Green, and he daubed some of the sticky substance on the lump. Murdoch jerked away from him.

"I almost forgot you've had a lot of experience dealing with bruises, haven't you?"

Green answered calmly but stopped what he was doing. "That's right."

Murdoch felt himself flush with anger. "Is that what this is all about, Green? Are you trying to warn me off? Are you? Or did you send somebody else to do the dirty work?"

But even as he said it, he knew the circumstances didn't really fit. Why would his attacker have whispered those chilling words in his ear. *I have punished two. I have one more to find.* Of course, that could be a ruse to throw him off track, but somehow he knew it wasn't. He - she - had meant every word.

"Have you got any more of that brandy?" he asked.

Green handed him the mug. Murdoch gulped the raw brandy to the dregs.

"I want you to work on me."

"Beg pardon, sir?"

"Work on me the way you would with one of your fighters. I've got to be up and moving now. Be quick."

Green took up the lantern and disappeared into the gloom of the barn. Murdoch was glad his back was protected and reached for the stick, but Elijah soon returned carrying a battered doctor's valise, which he put on the ground.

"Let's get you out of your jacket first."

The slightest lifting of his arms sent white-hot stabs of pain racing through Murdoch's muscles, but he managed to struggle out of his coat.

Green removed the cufflinks from Murdoch's shirt, shoved up the sleeves, then took out a bottle from his bag, uncorked it, and splashed some of the liquid into his cupped hand. There was a pungent smell of wintergreen. He started to rub the liniment into Murdoch's forearm. His grip was firm and sure, and in spite of himself, Murdoch began to relax as the pain abated.

“Why were you here in the barn?” Green asked as he turned to work on the other arm.

“I received a letter that was supposedly from Mrs. Adelaide Cooke, asking me to come here and I’d be given some information about Talbert’s death.”

Green shook his head. “Mrs. Cooke isn’t in town. I got a message that she’s gone to visit her sister in Georgetown and she left Musgrave in charge.”

“No, I know it wasn’t her.”

“Did you get any information?”

“No. Nothing.”

“I wonder why they wanted you here in the barn.”

“According to my attacker, so I could be taught a lesson. I was tied up in the same way that Talbert was tied, although in his case, they used a poker not a broom.”

Green stopped what he was doing. “It’d be easier to work on your legs if you removed your trousers.”

“Never mind about that. Do the best you can.” Murdoch felt he had experienced enough humiliation for one day. Green didn’t insist and returned the liniment bottle in the valise and wiped his hands on a piece of sacking. Then he started to knead deep into Murdoch’s thigh muscles. Murdoch yelped and tried to keep talking through his groans.

Finally, Green leaned back on his haunches. “That’ll do you for now, but you’re going to be stiff for a few days.”

“Thank you.” Murdoch eased himself back into his jacket. “My attacker said something very strange. He, or for that matter, she, said, ‘What God joined together should not have been. First the father, then the son, and last the holy one and we are done.’ Does that mean anything to you?”

Elijah looked puzzled. “Sounds sort of Papist. Don’t they say prayers like that?”

“The blessing is in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.”

“Somebody pretending to be Papist then?”

"Maybe, but it didn't sound like that to me. They used the word *punishment*. Two had been already punished and there was one more to find. I assume the two are Cooke and Talbert, but I'd better find out soon who is meant by the holy one."

"You said, man or woman. You think it might have been a woman who attacked you? She'd have to be real strong."

"I was taken by surprise and the person had a revolver and threatened to shoot me. As I couldn't see if it was an idle threat or not, I complied."

Green closed up his valise. "Sounds like sensible thinking to me." There was something in his voice, sympathy perhaps, and Murdoch realized he must have been conveying the sense of shame that was gripping his gut. How could he have been so foolish and so inept as to let himself be tricked like that? Rationally, he knew there hadn't been much he could do to defend himself, but he felt he'd behaved like a coward. His embarrassment made his voice sharp.

"Help me up, will you?"

Green tucked his arm under Murdoch's and got him to his feet. Murdoch felt wobbly but managed to take a couple of steps forward. His knees were shaking. He perched for a moment on the stool from which he had been so ignominiously thrown. He leaned his hands on his knees and paused, taking in a deep breath.

"Because somebody got the better of you doesn't mean you're not a man of bottom, as we say in the fight business," said Green. "In my books, you've got considerable bottom. If I'd been tied up like that for two hours I'd have been screaming for my mammy. You can have the courage of a lion in your heart, but if you've got no power, courage won't do you any good and it will eat at your innards instead."

Murdoch felt a rush of gratitude to the man, but it was himself he had to forgive. "Well? Do you have any ideas

you'd consider sharing about what I just said?"

Green hesitated, then pursed his lips. "The reference to the holy one could be significant to us. In the old days, in the Baptist Church we often called our preachers Holy, especially if they weren't lettered but had God in them. You know like, Jeremiah Holy, or Mariah Holy. You don't hear it as much these days because the preachers go to school and are educated. I suppose you'd say holy was an honorary title."

"Do you know anybody, anybody at all, who might have been referred to that way?"

Elijah nodded. "Come to think of it, I do. He used to be the pastor of our church before Pastor Laing came. I think he was lettered as well, but he was such a good man, people often called him, Preacher Archer, Holy."

"Is he still alive?"

"Yes, he is. He's elderly now, and his mind isn't always clear, but he might be worth talking to. He would certainly have known Thom Talbert from the early days. He lives in the manse next to the church with his wife."

Murdoch heard the raspy voice in his ear. *We have one more to find*. He hoped to God he would get there first.

He tried out his legs again. Better this time. His muscles were tingling and burning, but he thought he'd suffered no lasting damage except to his pride. Green had got him up to scratch. He almost grinned. He'd forever have sympathy with fighters after this.

Green caught hold of his arm. "Is the preacher in danger?"

"I don't know, but he's the only possibility at the moment. I've got to get over there."

"I'll come with you. He's one of us. And forgive me for saying so, Mr. Murdoch, but you'd have trouble apprehending a three-legged dog at the moment."

Murdoch could see it would be a waste of time to argue and he also needed him. "Come on, then."

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

It was Green's suggestion that they borrow one of the carriages and drive to the church. Murdoch accepted the offer gratefully, and while Elijah was hitching up the horse, he limped into the office and telephoned the station. He was relieved to hear Charlie Seymour's voice. Briefly he filled him in as to what had happened and reassured him that he was all right.

"Send a constable to 183 Mutual Street. Mrs. Cooke is supposed to be away, make sure she is. If she isn't, bring her into the station. I don't care if you have to drag her there in cuffs. Also, I want to talk to one of the cabbies, his name is Paul Musgrave. Bring him in too. I'll be there as soon as I can...No, I don't know if they are our culprits, but somebody was able to get into the barn here and I'm taking no chances. I don't have time to tell you everything at the moment, Charlie, but there's one more person I hope to God can fill in the missing pieces for us. Have Fyfer get over to the Baptist Church on Queen Street. Tell him to go to the manse. I should be there before him, but tell him to expect to stay all night."

There was still a light burning in the front window of the manse and when Green knocked, the door was answered

promptly. An elderly woman whom Murdoch recognized from the church stood on the threshold.

“Good gracious, Elijah. What is it?”

Murdoch stepped forward and introduced himself quickly. “I do apologize for the hour, ma’am, but I’m afraid it is a matter of some urgency. I wonder if I might speak to Reverend Archer?”

He assumed this woman was the pastor’s wife. She wasn’t budging.

“It is very late and he’s already had one visitor this evening.” Mrs. Archer might be tiny, but she was as daunting as a mother doe defending her young. Her feet were braced, her eyes fixed on Murdoch. “Can your business wait until tomorrow?”

Murdoch forced himself to speak calmly. “I would prefer to deal with the matter tonight, ma’am.”

Green interjected. “I can vouch for the detective, Mrs. Archer. The matter is most urgent. It has to do with Thomas’s death.”

She stepped back. “Come this way, then.”

They followed her down the hall, through a large kitchen that smelled of baked bread, then through another door into a short hall. Pastor Archer’s apartment was an addition to the house.

Mrs. Archer glanced over her shoulder. “I told my husband that Thomas was dead, but I don’t know if he quite understood. I do ask you to be careful what you say to him.”

She rapped on the door.

“Stanley? Stanley? Elijah Green is here and somebody from the police who wishes to speak to you.”

There was no answer, and Green and Murdoch exchanged worried glances. Then they heard the sound of an old man’s rheumy cough and a muffled “Enter.” Mrs. Archer ushered them past her into the room.

An elderly negro, small and stooped with a fringe of beard and close-cropped white hair, was standing by the

fire, warming his hands. He was wearing an old-fashioned brown velvet smoking jacket and matching cap. He looked as dry and brittle as a grasshopper.

"Come in, both of you, come in." He waved his hand politely. "I do apologize for the untidy state of my home, but I was just going through my papers."

The living room was fairly spacious although it was untidy, papers scattered all over the floor. The walls were lined with high bookcases, all of them stuffed with stacks of bound papers. The air was thick and smoky from tobacco.

"I've been asked to write down my life story, you know," the pastor continued. He glanced over at his wife. "Isn't that so, Leah?"

"Indeed it is, Stanley. How are you progressing?"

The old man sank into an armchair that was drawn up close to the hearth. "Slowly, I must admit, it is going slowly."

"How long did your visitor stay?" she asked him. "She must have let herself out while I was upstairs."

"Who are you referring to?"

"The American lady who was here to see you. Did you have a good chat?"

The pastor sighed. "That was a long time ago, Leah. You can hardly expect me to remember that. I see so many people."

Mrs. Archer's eyes flickered over to Murdoch and he understood.

"Stanley, you remember Elijah, don't you?"

The preacher's eyes were vague. "I'm afraid I don't. Have we met before?"

"Not for some time, Pastor."

"And this is Mr. Murdoch. He is a police officer and he wants to talk to you on matters of great urgency that can't wait until morning."

Archer eyed Murdoch calmly. "Is that so, sir?"

"Yes, it is."

"Then you had best have a seat. Leah, would you be so good as to bring us some of your splendid coffee. The detective looks as if he could do with some. And I'm sure the young man would like some as well."

"Not for me, thank you, sir," said Murdoch. Green shook his head.

"Make some for me then, Leah. I'll have it afterwards."

Mrs. Archer headed for the door. "Don't tax him, Mr. Murdoch. He's just getting over a cold. I'll be back directly."

Murdoch turned to Green. "Perhaps you could help Mrs. Archer while I talk to the reverend."

Green hesitated.

"Don't worry," said Murdoch. "I'll be careful."

Mrs. Archer looked surprised. She was too well mannered to give into her anxiety and curiosity both, but Murdoch knew she wouldn't be away long.

"Don't mind my wife," said the preacher after the door had closed behind them. He smiled. "She's as fussy as an old hen. Praise the Lord." He waved his hand. "You'll have to take me as you see me. I'm writing my life story, which is what all those papers are about. I have almost finished. I'd never have thought when I was a young man that there'd be anybody in the white world interested in reading about the misery of the coloured folk. They seemed like they didn't want to hear, see, or speak about what was happening to us. But now it's different. I've got a publisher who can't wait to print my memoirs, as he calls them. 'The more misery you put in, Stanley, the better it will sell,' was what he said. Amen to that, says I. Not that I've got to make any of it up, you understand. I surely don't. My mammy and pappy were both slaves, hallelujah, and my relations likewise, so I've got plenty of misery enough to fill ten books."

The pastor appeared quite lucid, and he reminded Murdoch of Thomas Talbert, although he was probably a few years older.

"Have a seat, sir. You can just move those papers to the floor. That's it. I'll stir up the fire a bit. I don't have that much flesh on my bones any more and I feel the cold."

The fire was already blazing, but the pastor added a couple more pieces of coal from the shuttle.

Murdoch did as he said, his muscles complaining. His head was pounding.

The old man fussed with the fire, then returned to his armchair. His expression changed and he looked at Murdoch, his face full of worry.

"Leah said you were a police officer. Have you found her then?"

"Found who, sir?"

"Thomas's daughter. There's no word yet?"

Murdoch had no idea what he was referring to. "Word about what, Reverend?"

The question disturbed the preacher, who picked up his pipe from the table. "I'll think better if I have my trusty friend in my hand."

"Do you mind if I join you?" asked Murdoch, and he took his clay from his pocket. He was about to share his packet of tobacco when Archer handed him a tin.

"Try this. You won't find this in the stores here. I get it sent up from North Carolina."

When they'd both settled the business of tamping and lighting and drawing, Murdoch tried again. He thought he had better tread carefully.

"I understand you have known Thomas Talbert for a long time, sir."

"I have indeed. Poor Thom, he's had a mighty trying time of it lately. Did he tell you if he was going to accept Mr. Cooke's offer? I advised him to." The old man was speaking as if Talbert were alive.

"Er, yes, I believe he has."

The pastor drew on his pipe and was temporarily lost in a haze of smoke. Suddenly he looked at Murdoch in alarm.

“Are you from America?”

“No, sir. I’m not. I live here in Toronto.”

“Amen to that. I feared you were tracking them down. If you are, don’t expect me to help you because I won’t.”

“No, sir,” said Murdoch gently. “I’m not tracking them down at all.”

Archer seemed not to hear him and he went on, speaking quickly. “They have nothing, most of them, when they arrive. But we do the best we can, hallelujah. My wife lives the gospel, and she is wondrous capable at getting them clothes and places to stay.” He shook his head and tears welled up in his eyes. “Such terrible stories I hear from them.”

Archer puffed on his pipe and abruptly his focus changed. “Thomas took the offer, did he? I’m surprised he hasn’t told me after all the to-do he was making. But I’m glad to hear that because I’ve been afeared for some weeks that he would do Mr. Cooke harm.”

“How so, sir?”

Murdoch looked at the preacher, waiting. The man looked back, searching for something in Murdoch’s face that presumably he found because finally he let out a sigh and said, “I don’t know if you are familiar with the practices of the Roman Catholic Church, but in their faith, the priest listens to confessions of sins, misdeeds, and so on that he then absolves –”

“I do know of it,” said Murdoch.

“Then you must also know that these confessions are considered to be of the utmost confidentiality. A priest is not allowed to reveal what is said, even if threatened by law...in that faith I believe the priest is considered to have a direct connection to God. I don’t accept that myself.” He smiled sheepishly. “Sorry, I am wandering from the point. You see, as a pastor, I am frequently called upon by my parishioners for counsel from anything of the most trivial, what should I plant in the garden this year, to matters of great moment,

how can I settle my affairs when I die so that my children don't quarrel with each other? I do not repeat what my people tell me." He struggled for words. "On the other hand, I am not a Romish priest and sworn to a vow of secrecy."

Murdoch didn't think the priests actually took such a vow, it was more a matter of canon law, but he wasn't about to correct the pastor. "Please go on, Reverend. I do respect your position, but what you have to say might be very helpful to me. Thomas Talbert confided in you?"

"Yes. We have been friends since boyhood. We went to Sackville School together. Thom was always determined to become a man of means, which he is now, of course, and I have been called by our Lord to spread the Good News."

Murdoch nodded, but Archer didn't pay attention, lost in his thoughts. Whatever they were, it was clearly disturbing to him.

"Poor fellow. He doesn't want to part with the stable, I know that, but God's ways are mysterious to us and He has visited Thomas with severe misfortune. He must consider himself lucky to be able to get any of his money out of it at all."

He fell silent again and Murdoch began to wonder if that was the extent of the confidence that Talbert had shared with him. However, the old man continued.

"Thom is a hothead, he always has been." He looked over at Murdoch. "He is convinced that Cooke is responsible for the fires, although it seems quite unlikely. Worse, he insists that Daniel has poisoned his horses. I know that was a most mysterious affair, but these things happen to animals, don't they? He had to admit his veterinarian couldn't find any poison, but he is unshakeable. What troubles me, though, sir, is that he is so intent on revenge. I have reminded him, Revenge is Mine, sayeth the Lord, but he will have none of it." Archer drew deeply on his pipe. "His desire is like a poison itself. He will wait, I know he will. He said so himself. I cannot talk him out of it."

Suddenly, the old man stared at Murdoch. "We've got off the topic again. I know that Thomas darsn't go to America himself. Has he hired you?"

"Er, no, sir. I'm a police officer."

Archer stared at him in surprise. "Are you, indeed? I'm glad to hear it. I thought that the matter was of no concern to the city."

"It is, sir. A matter of great concern."

"Good, good. Would it help if you saw a picture of the girl yourself?"

Before Murdoch could find an answer, Archer got to his feet and shuffled over to his desk. He rummaged in the back for a few minutes, muttering to himself, then returned carrying a flat, oblong leather case. He took out a small *card de visite* case. It was pretty with a gilt finish.

"Such a dreadful tragedy. Praise the Lord, who moves in mysterious ways. But we are all praying for a happy outcome." He handed Murdoch the case. "This was taken recently. She herself gave this to me shortly before her marriage." Murdoch took the case and opened it. The place where the picture would have been was empty.

"What has happened to her, Reverend?"

The old man looked bewildered. "Why do you ask me? I thought that was why you were here?"

"No, sir. I'm afraid I don't know what has happened to Miss Talbert."

"Nobody can find her. Her husband has been searching for weeks to no avail."

"Why is she missing?"

"I'm astonished you don't know. It happened right after she was married. They were in Niagara on their wedding tour. The unfortunate man blames himself, of course."

"And what has happened to her?"

"She has been kidnapped and sold into slavery."

"My God!"

“We must not take the Lord’s name in vain, sir, but we are praying constantly for her safe return.”

“Who is her husband, Reverend? Who did she marry?”

“Don’t you know? He is one of Thom’s cabbies.”

The pastor’s eyes drifted away.

“Who? Which cabbie do you mean, Reverend?” Murdoch asked, trying desperately to contain his impatience.

“His name is Daniel Cooke.”

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

Murdoch was still reeling from this information when the pastor said, "Are you of the Baptist faith, Mr. Murdoch?"

"No sir. I am a Roman Catholic."

"Indeed? Well I don't suppose Christian prayer is so much different, is it?"

Although he had the feeling Father Fair's hair would stand on end at this blasphemy, Murdoch nodded. "I don't think it is either, Reverend."

The pastor picked agitatedly at the crocheted armrest cover. "Emeline needs our prayers. She must be found before it is too late. Her mother came to see me this very night and I know she is distraught. I could hardly comfort her. Forgive me, sir, my memory is not as good as it was, things slip away like papers off my desk. But as I recall she was asking me about a child. She said his name was Isaiah, but I don't know a boy by that name." He shrugged. "I don't know why she was inquiring about him, she never said." He sighed. "The poor woman was in such pain and although I say it I shouldn't, I don't believe she is long for this earth. The Lord is ready to receive her...but we were about to do something, weren't we?"

"You wanted to pray, Reverend."

Somewhat stiffly, the pastor got off his chair and went down on his knees. He clasped his hands and raised his eyes to the ceiling.

“Oh Lord Jesus, who we know loves his children as a shepherd loves his sheep, I pray to you this night for guidance.”

Murdoch didn't dare trust his legs to kneel, but he, too, clasped his hands and bowed his head. The pastor's voice grew louder.

“Help me, Lord, to know Your Will in this matter. You who gave your only begotten son that we might have eternal life, you who know what it is to suffer, show us the way, Lord. Show me the way that I might do what is right for those of your children who have particularly suffered from the wickedness of the world and those sinners who do not know the glory of thy Love. Show me, Lord, I pray. This child is in need of a good family. May that family be presented to me by your grace.”

He was swaying back and forth and seemed almost to have gone into a trance. Murdoch waited uncomfortably. Finally, the pastor came to a halt and unclasped his hands. He remained on his knees.

Then the door opened and Green came in carrying a tea tray. Behind him was Mrs. Archer. She went over to her husband. “Look at you, you should be in bed. Enough praying for now.”

Green helped her to get her husband to his feet and back in his chair. He looked exhausted.

“Emeline needs our prayers, Leah. We cannot fail her. I have let her down once, I cannot do it a second time.”

“Never mind that for now. We will get the entire congregation to pray for her.” She tucked a blanket around the pastor's legs. “I want you to drink your posset and then it's off to bed with you.”

He took the mug she handed him and drank the hot milk greedily. When he looked up, he had a white moustache on

his upper lip. Gently, his wife leaned over and wiped it off with a napkin.

He replaced the mug on the table and closed his eyes. "So much sorrow, Leah. So much sorrow." In a moment, he seemed to have fallen asleep.

Mrs. Archer stood back and addressed Murdoch. "There is a constable at the door, sir. I didn't let him in because I thought it would upset Stanley too much."

"Thank you, ma'am. I'll speak to him."

Green followed him into the hall.

"I should get back to the stable and tend to the horses, Mr. Murdoch. Is the pastor in any danger?"

"I'm still not sure. Things are falling into place, but I don't intend to take any risks. I'm going to have a watch put on the house until we find our culprit."

"Good. And I'll put out the word too." He gave a grim smile. "I am acquainted with some good bruisers. We will make sure he is quite safe."

Murdoch put out his hand. "Thank you for your help. I apologize that I was not particularly gracious before."

Green shook hands heartily. "I wouldn't have been either. How are you feeling?"

"Maybe not as bad as the Chopper and Lincoln, but close."

Fyfer was standing at the bottom of the steps and he watched Green as he left.

Murdoch beckoned to him. "Frank, I want you to patrol this street. Don't allow anybody to approach the house. In particular, be on the lookout for a stocky, middle-aged coloured man. He may be wearing a fedora and long mackintosh. Be careful. He is dangerous."

Fyfer saluted. He liked this kind of assignment.

Murdoch returned to the apartment. The pastor was still asleep. Mrs. Archer looked up at him anxiously.

"What is happening, Mr. Murdoch? Elijah told me you had been attacked and probably by the same person who

shot Thomas. And now you have a constable at the door. Surely we are not under suspicion?"

"Good gracious no, Mrs. Archer. But I am afraid your husband might be in some danger."

"Why?"

"I believe it has to do with something that happened a long time ago, and that the deaths of Daniel Cooke and Thomas Talbert are connected. My attacker spoke of teaching them a lesson and that there was one more to do. He used the words *the holy one*. Elijah tells me your husband was once referred to in that way."

"That's right. It sounds strange to hear now." She sank back into the chair. "Will we ever be free from the past? That terrible tragedy haunts us yet."

Like her husband, she seemed tired, her sprightliness evaporating, and she suddenly looked old and frail, like him.

"Did he talk to you about Thomas Talbert's daughter?" she asked.

"Yes, he did. He seemed to think I was here because she has disappeared. Abducted, I gather."

"Thirty-eight years ago."

"The pastor said she married Daniel Cooke."

"Very few people knew of it. The marriage was kept secret."

She sat down next to her husband and just as he had picked up his pipe for comfort, she picked up an embroidery sampler that was on one of the chairs and took out the needle. She was picking out the words *The Lord is our saviour*, and the linen cloth was thick with flowers. While she spoke, she concentrated on her sewing and hardly looked at Murdoch.

"Did he tell you that he's been asked to write his life story?"

"Yes, he did."

"Did Stanley say what the publishing man said to him?"

"About including the misery?"

“That’s it. If that man had said it in front of me, I would have turned him out of doors. We have too many tales to pick from. Girls barely out of childhood raped by the men who owned them; women treated like brood mares, only not as well; young men mutilated because they glanced the wrong way at the white missus. My own father was whipped into unconsciousness because he himself refused to beat another slave. Which story do you want, sir?”

Murdoch had no easy words of comfort. He could only wait until she was ready to continue. She bit off the end of her silk thread and examined her work.

“Emeline Talbert was sold into slavery immediately following her marriage to Daniel Cooke. They were on their wedding tour in Niagara Falls, and an American slave trader kidnapped her. She was never seen again. Amen. Poor Thomas lost most of his hard-earned money trying to find her, but about four years after she disappeared, Daniel Cooke received a letter from a doctor who said he had been at her deathbed. So that was that. Very soon afterwards, Daniel married Adelaide Peckwith, who, I might say without implying anything, had a substantial dowry. But you said your attacker spoke of teaching somebody a lesson?”

“Yes, and I was one of them apparently. And I now believe Daniel Cooke and Thomas Talbert were also recipients.”

“And my husband might be another?”

“Yes. But please don’t worry. My constable is outside and Elijah is bringing over some men who I’m sure will have very strong arms.”

She rethreaded her needle and began to sew, fast and deft. “Thank you, Mr. Murdoch, but we are no strangers to danger.” She smiled at him, a sweet, wry smile. “On the other hand, neither my husband nor I could be said to have the strength of our youth, so I will make no protest about accepting your help.”

“I will make sure our villain is soon behind bars.”

She didn't speak for a few moments, preoccupied with her own thoughts. A primrose began to take shape on the sampler. "Marriages between a white man and a coloured woman were rare at that time. Emeline Talbert was beautiful, she could have passed for white easily, but she wasn't white, and I always wondered why Daniel Cooke wanted to marry her. He wasn't that intelligent a man in my opinion, but smooth as butter around the ladies. There were many eligible white women who would have jumped at the opportunity to marry him. But he swept Emeline off her feet. Alas, even then I suspected his motives." She sighed. "Even if I had voiced them to Emeline, she would not have listened. Thomas wasn't rich, but he had worked hard to make money and his stable was thriving, but Daniel acted as if he were bestowing an honour on the family. A white man marrying a coloured girl." She jabbed her needle into the cloth. "She would have made a good match without him, I'm sure. And one among her own people."

The preacher let out a soft snore and she glanced over at him.

"Stanley has not really forgiven himself even for officiating at the marriage. He had the same misgivings I did, but he allowed himself to be talked out of them. He feared that if he refused to marry them, they would have eloped, and that would have been worse. She was a headstrong, motherless girl."

Murdoch needed to probe further. Carefully. "The pastor thought the woman who came to see him earlier today was Mr. Talbert's wife."

"Did he? Well she's long gone too, poor soul. She died before Emeline was wed and sometimes I tell you frankly, I praise the Lord, that she never knew about that wedding and what happened to her daughter."

"I interviewed Mr. Talbert before he died and he never mentioned that Daniel Cooke had been his son-in-law."

“No, he wouldn’t have. He was ashamed of ever giving his permission, and I know he always blamed himself. He had no reason to except that the long illness of her mother had made Emeline grow up without a guiding hand. Thomas at that time was far too concerned with becoming rich and he drank too much, so the child was left to servants to manage. I’m not saying she wasn’t a good girl at heart, I believe she was, but when Cooke came a calling, she was only seventeen and she was determined to have this man. Thomas knew nothing would stop her.” She glanced over at Murdoch, her face drawn with sadness. “He married a white woman a few years back, a widow she was. She’s a good woman, and they suited each other in my opinion, but there are those in the white world who believe fervently that the races should never mix...except illicitly when a white man has his way with a negro girl. I presume that is acceptable.”

She studied her husband for a moment.

“I should get him into his proper bed. He often falls asleep in his chair and he always gets a stiff neck from it.”

He hesitated. “Are you suggesting that somebody is punishing Cooke and Mr. Talbert for marrying outside of their race? Mr. Cooke’s marriage was many years ago.”

She gave a little shrug. “Sometimes a wound festers for a long time before it kills.”

Murdoch’s thoughts were starting to go in a different direction. “I have no wish to upset you, ma’am, but there are one or two things I need to ask you. Mr. Cooke was whipped at least thirty-seven to thirty-nine times, although he died from a heart attack midway through the beating.” He took out the drawing he had made and held it out to her. “Mr. Talbert was tied after death into this position. Are those two things significant?”

She looked at the sketch and flinched, turning her head away. “I would say they are very significant. They were both common forms of punishments for slaves. Thirty-nine lashes meted out for the most trivial of transgressions: a strange

look, being too slow to come when called, singing God's hymn when you shouldn't." She indicated the paper. "That method of tying was what was known as the Spanish Stoop. Slaves would be left in that position for hours. It was a way to break their spirit."

Murdoch was still suffering from that punishment.

Mrs. Archer wiped at her eyes. "My husband and I were very active in what we called the Underground Railroad. We helped many fugitive slaves who came up from America that way. Some of them were children, infants even, sent by desperate mothers to safety." Once again she studied her sampler, as if it comforted her. "For so many of us, Canada was the Promised Land, where the wounds would all be healed. But the Lord in his wisdom has seen fit to keep us in this valley of the shadow and I know not when we will see our green pastures. I fear it will not be in my lifetime."

She fell silent, full of memories, and when she spoke, she did so with her head lowered. "By law, you see, we are free and equal in Canada, but true equality does not necessarily rest in law only, as I'm sure you know, Mr. Murdoch. True equality has to exist in the heart. And there are always those who do not have open hearts and think we should be in our place. Not slaves, oh my goodness no, that is an American abomination but not equal, God forbid, never equal. Perhaps you read in the newspapers only last week, Mr. Murdoch, a coloured man was lynched by a mob in the city of Newark. He was attempting to save his two daughters who were being accosted. You could no doubt sit here for an hour or more and I could tell you similar tales and not repeat myself."

Murdoch had read in the *Globe* about the incident but hadn't paid much attention.

"The hope lies with the children, does it not?" she continued. "Children who are born free." Her face was soft in the firelight. "The youngest child we rescued was barely three months old. He came to us so sickly we were afraid he

might not live but, hallelujah, he did and has thrived. He was born with six fingers, you see, and somebody had tried to remove the extra finger by binding it with twine. One hand became infected and it was a miracle, the Lord be thanked, that he didn't lose either his hand or his life. But he thrived in the love of our Saviour and he's a grown man now with a family of his own."

Murdoch stared at her. "I beg your pardon, ma'am, but did you say the child was born with six fingers?"

"That's right." She regarded him, wary now at his reaction. "It is not uncommon, sir. It means nothing. It is not a sign of the devil."

"I apologize, ma'am. That was not what I was thinking. But this boy, do you know where he is now?"

"He was placed with a good Christian family who were themselves fugitives. Why are you asking?"

"Did you keep a record of this placement?"

He could see her fingers clenching the hoop of her sampler. "We did, but I should tell you, Mr. Murdoch, my husband holds strong views about the necessity for keeping those records confidential. He saved many a child from shame by quietly and privately arranging for them to go to a good Christian family. Frankly, sir, many of these children were the result of rape, usually a white man on a coloured girl. Stanley believes that if it's God's will for those children to know their parentage He will ensure it happens, otherwise we will not interfere."

Murdoch leaned forward, trying to temper his urgency. "Mrs. Archer, I will respect your views, but I do need some information. This child, did you yourselves know his parentage?"

She shook her head. "No we did not. A Quaker family brought him to us. They were from Ohio and all they could tell us was that his mother was a fugitive, a very young girl who had barely escaped with her life. She had been able to hand the baby over to a minister of God who in turn got him

to Mr. and Mrs. Scott. The pastor, alas, died in a fire that was deliberately set when he returned to his church."

"Will you tell me this child's name? I wouldn't ask if I didn't consider it most important."

Mrs. Archer hesitated, and he was afraid she would refuse to answer. He knew he could get a warrant to see the records, but he didn't want to do that. Finally, she slumped a little as if she could read his thoughts.

"I must stress that he himself does not know his parentage. He believes that Mr. and Mrs. Gr -" She stopped and her hand flew to her mouth.

Murdoch finished the sentence for her. "Mr. and Mrs. Green. Elijah was that boy."

"Yes."

Now that she'd said it, Murdoch realized what had been nagging at him. Green didn't look anything like his brother, Lincoln. He was taller, lighter-skinned, with sharper features. And at the same time, Murdoch recognized who he did, in fact, resemble, he who also had six fingers, hexadactylis: Thomas Talbert.

Both Murdoch and Mrs. Archer heard the sound of footsteps outside in the hall, then the door burst open. A woman stood for a moment on the threshold, then she lifted the revolver she held in her hand and fired straight at Stanley Archer.

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

"There you are, Fiddie. Come and sit down, I have something for you." Lena handed the sepia-coloured daguerreotype to Faith. "I thought you might like this."

The other woman viewed it suspiciously. "Where'd you get it and why are you giving it to me now?"

"I stole it from the poor old preacher. He's quite senile, so it wasn't hard." She stretched out her hand again. "Please, take the picture."

Faith slapped her hand away so that the daguerreotype fell to the floor. "I don't want it. You're a planning to stay here, ain't ya? Well, don't think for one blue second I'm going anywhere without you."

Lena's voice was sharp. "Yes, you are, Fiddie. And you're going tonight. It's only a matter of time before we're caught."

"You didn't do nothing. It was me. I thought he was goin' to punch you, father or no father, when I shot him. And I'm sorry, I've said I'm sorry."

Lena stood up, took her cane, and began to walk up and down. They were in the hotel room, the lights burning low. Bursts of laughter came from outside on the lawn where there was some kind of birthday celebration in progress.

"It doesn't matter any more, Fiddie. You did what you thought was right for me. In fact, I'd say my father died to me a long time ago."

"He was lying, you know. He was in on the sale just as deep as the other one."

Lena winced as she made a turn. "Was he, Fiddie? I was starting to believe him."

Faith was almost yelling. "Well, don't. He was lying. Do you think he's going to come right out and say he sold his own daughter? No, he ain't."

"There was an expression on his face when he saw me... it was joy."

"No, it weren't. It were pure shit fear."

"Calm yourself, Fiddie. We don't want the manager knocking at the door. I've told you it doesn't matter to me any more and it doesn't."

"Why'd you go to see the preacher man? You crept out as cagey as a white massa coming down to the quarters. You was up to no good. Why're you speaking so sweet and honeyed about him? 'Poor old preacher.' I thought he was the last one for us to do? Did you change your mind?"

"Yes, I have, Fiddie. I've had my fill. Believe me, things look different when you're moving toward death. What seemed of consummate importance once, no longer is that way. Besides, Pastor Archer was kind to me when I was a girl."

"That's not what you were saying afore."

"Wasn't it? I hardly remember any more."

Faith glared in exasperation. "That's mighty convenient. Well, I'se remember. I remember everything you'se said over all these years. 'First the son, then the father, then the holy one who should a knowed better.' All those years, we talks about it and we plans and we saves our money till we could come here and eat that sweet meat of revenge. And now you'se waving it away like it were no more special than

a mosquito landing on your arm. You says it was nothing when you knows it was everything."

"Fiddie, please. We mustn't quarrel now of all times."

Faith was not placated. "Did you tell this good old preacher man who you were?"

"I didn't have to. He's confused in himself. He thought I was my own mother." She gazed at Faith. "He said that my father was distraught over my disappearance."

"Any fool can fake that. Ain't hard at all. So that's why you've gone all soft on me. Cos you think your pappy really cared and tried to find you."

"The preacher said Pa had lost almost all of his money searching."

"Well, we didn't hear of it none, did we?"

"No, and I think that's because Daniel took it."

"You're not getting sorry 'bout him too, are you?"

"No. When he saw me and realized I'd come back, it was as sweet a moment as I'd ever imagined it would be."

"And he deserved a whipping. He deserved it a lot more than you and me when we got our thirty-nine."

"I know that, Fiddie, I know that." She moved to the couch by the window. "Come and sit beside me, dearest."

"Not until you tell me why you've got that look on your face. You're going to tell me something bad, and I won't hear it."

She put her hands over her ears. Lena smiled at her.

"You look twelve years old when you do that. Don't be silly. Come and sit close to me, one last time."

"One last time," Faith shrieked. "I told you I ain't goin' nowhere."

"Well I am. You can't pretend any more, Fiddie. I am dying. I want to die in the place I was born."

"That don't make no sense. You ain't been here since you was no more than a child. What about our house? You'll be comfortable there."

"I know that, dearest. But the fact is, it isn't safe for you. No, hear me out. My last days on this earth would be unsupportable if I thought that you had been captured and were in jail. I shall say I killed the two of them, but if you are there they will charge you as an accomplice."

Faith ran over to the wardrobe and dragged out the valise. "We can still get away. We've done it before."

"Fiddie. You're not listening. I don't want to run any more."

"But you'll need me to look after you."

"They won't let you. If we are caught and we surely will be, we will be separated. Come, please, please sit beside me. I cannot go on talking to your back."

Faith reluctantly turned and went over to sit on the couch. Lena put an arm around her shoulder, drew her close, and began to stroke her hair. "Death is going to separate us anyway, so this is only a little earlier than planned."

"I'll die too. I'll die at the same time."

Lena kissed the other woman's forehead. "No, you won't. If you love me, you will grant me this, Fiddie. You've got many years left to live in you. I want to know that you are safe."

"Safe don't mean much if you're in misery. How can I be happy without you? We ain't bin separated since I first knowed you."

"You must try. I'll be with you, just not physically. You've survived so much, Fiddie, you can survive this. Please, for my sake."

Faith stuck out her lower lip. "No, it's too much to ask. I want to stay with you till you pass."

Lena lost patience. "But I don't want you to do that. I want you to get your clothes together now and leave. There isn't much time if you want to catch the last train. You've got plenty of money and you can be in New York by tomorrow."

"What will you do?"

"I'll wait here. It's comfortable. I don't think that detective will be too long finding me out."

"He don't suspect anything. He won't come."

"If he doesn't, then I shall send for him. They won't look too hard for you if they think they've already got the killer."

"I don't like it, none of it."

"If you don't do this for me, I shall come back and haunt you."

"You can't haunt somebody who's already a ghost. What do you think I am, the little pickaninny from the garden still? Well, I ain't."

"I know that, my dearest. I know what you feel, but I'm asking you to do this for my sake. I want you to promise to live out your natural life, and you'll know I'll be waiting for you on the other side."

"Mebbe there ain't another side. Mebbe this is all we got."

"Of course it isn't. I'll be there and I won't have any pain any more and I'll open my arms and take you in them just as before."

"You and your pretty words."

Lena straightened up. "You must go, Fiddie. Travel as a man, it's safer and less conspicuous. Go, my little nigger gal, before I start crying myself. We can't have two of us blubbering at the same time."

"Why not, we've done it before many a time?"

"Come on, there's a good girl. Get your things."

Suddenly, Faith seized Lena's face between her hands and gazed into her eyes.

"I just told you, I knows you better than my own soul. You still ain't telling the entire and whole truth. You wants to send me away because you can't find it in your heart to forgive me for what I done. I shot your pappy just when you were thinking he cared for you. Ain't that the case, tell me true from your heart."

"I know you were trying to defend me, Fiddie."

"But you're mad 'cos I tied him up in the Stoop when you had run out of there to look at the garden or whatever it was you was doing."

Lena shrugged. "He was dead. He would not feel it."

"If it's not that, what is it, then? There's something come between us for all your pretty words. I shall go mad if you don't tell me."

Gently, Lena removed Faith's hands. "Nothing is important now except that we part this last time with love for each other. You have been my right hand for so many years. It is not only you who will find it hard to be separated, Fiddie, I will find it agonizing."

"No, I won't go anywhere. You ain't telling me all the truth that's to tell. You went to that preacher man because you wanted to make sure about Isaiah, didn't you?"

Lena grew stiff and she looked away. "Why would I do that? I know he died. You told me so."

"But I always knows you didn't believe me. Never did. Even after all these years, you thought I was lying to you."

"No, Fiddie, not lying. Never that. It's just that I sometimes thought, or hoped, you were mistaken. You never saw his body, after all."

"I didn't need to. I sees the church on fire. And I hears later that the preacher was burned to death. I'd given him the babe so I knows he must be dead. I've told you this a dozen times."

"You're acting jealous and you don't have to. I was curious, is all. I just wanted to make sure before it was too late that my son had not made it to Toronto as I requested, as you swore to me you told the minister. 'Take him to Toronto, Canada, and hand him over to Reverend Archer.'"

"I did say that. That's exactly what I tells the pastor before I runs for my life. If he could have got the child out, he would have. And I ain't being jealous. Why should I be

jealous over somebody who ain't alive? So, what did the old man tell you?"

"He couldn't tell me anything. He lives in the past."

"You're a liar. He told you s-something and it-it has come between us." Faith was sobbing so hard she could hardly speak. Finally, Lena reached under the cushion that was on the couch and pulled out a little blue linen jacket.

"He showed me the boxes where he kept his records and mementoes of the children he had saved. There was one labelled *Unknown* , but the date seemed right so I opened it. The jacket I sewed for Ise was in there." She pointed at the collar. "The place where I'd sewed the paper with his name and my name and the date of his birth, remember?"

Faith nodded sullenly.

"The paper was still there unread and untouched," Lena continued, "but I knew for certain he had survived." Tenderly, she picked up the jacket and pressed it against her cheek.

Faith stared at her in horror. "I swear to you - I didn't...I didn't know. I thought he died in that fire."

"When I asked you if you had seen the body, you said you had."

"No, you are remembering wrong. I said I hears from somebody who told me the minister had been found all burned up and there was a baby's body there too."

"But that wasn't the truth, was it, Fiddie? You preferred it if I believed my child was dead."

Faith was rocking back and forth and moaning. "I didn't want you to fret. You - you would've wore yourself right out trying to get to him if you thought he was still alive. I thought it better to let him go." She caught Lena's hand and kissed it passionately. "Tell me you don't hate me, darling Lena. I did what I thought was best."

"Fiddie, I will never hate you. How could I?"

“But when you die, it won’t be me you’ll be thinking of, it’ll be him and how you never knew him. And whether he’s alive now. Won’t it? Tell me the truth, it’ll be him, won’t it?”

“It’s all in the past. It’s too late for regrets.”

“You didn’t answer my question. It’ll be him you thinks about on your deathbed, ain’t it?”

Lena’s eyes were filled with tears. “Yes, Fiddie. In all likelihood, it will be him.”

“So what you’re saying is you ain’t ever going to forgive me.”

Lena sighed. “Yes, I suppose that is what I’m saying.”

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

Later, Mrs. Archer swore that the good Lord himself had deflected the bullet. Murdoch thought that God had been assisted by the surprise that the assailant had experienced on seeing Murdoch leaping toward him. Unfortunately, he was detoured by Mrs. Archer's cry and the necessity of determining the condition of the pastor who had blood pouring from the side of his face. Murdoch just had time to register that the shooter had fled. He ran over to tend to the old man. The bullet had shattered the lamp beside him and shards of glass had cut his scalp and cheek, but otherwise he was unhurt. Minutes later, Fyfer ran into the room and Murdoch was about to berate him for neglecting his duty when he saw that he, too, was bleeding. He had an ugly bruise on his temple.

"She knocked me down, sir. I'm sorry."

"Never mind that now. We should get a doctor for Mr. Archer."

"I can look after him," said Mrs. Archer. She used her sampler to staunch the blood.

"You're a tough old rooster, aren't you, Stanley? You've survived far worse than this." She nodded at Murdoch. "Go and do your duty, detective, we'll be all right."

Murdoch left them in Fyfer's care.

It took him almost half an hour to get to the Elliott Hotel as, in spite of his willpower, his muscles refused to move quickly. His back had gone into a painful spasm and at one point he doubted whether his legs would ever support him again.

The hotel was in darkness and he went around to the rear where Mrs. Dittman's room was, afraid she might have already fled.

He need not have worried. The curtains were not drawn and there was a low light shining. He could see her seated in a chair by the window and he knew she was waiting for him.

She saw him coming and stood up to let him in by the French doors.

"Good evening, Mr. Murdoch. I was expecting you. Please come in." She indicated the tea trolley. "I can offer you tea if you would like, but I cannot answer as to how warm it still is."

"No thank you, ma'am."

Normally, Murdoch would have been angered by this hypocritical facade of good manners, but there was something about the woman that softened his response.

"I shall have to take my medicine, if you don't mind, Mr. Murdoch. I can speak with a clearer mind then."

"By all means, ma'am."

She limped to the dresser and poured something from a brown vial into a cup on the side table. She took a deep swallow and shuddered slightly. "Not the best taste in the world. It quite ruins the tea, but it does its job."

Murdoch had taken the chair in front of the fireplace and she sat down opposite him.

"I suppose you are expecting me to go through a song and dance of denial, Mr. Murdoch, but frankly I don't have the energy. I know why you have come and I am willing to

be quite truthful with you.” She paused and smiled a wry smile. “On the other hand, perhaps I should hear from your own mouth why you are here. I should not be too premature.”

She thinks it might be better to stall a little longer, thought Murdoch.

“I have come because I believe you are implicated in the deaths of Daniel Cooke and Thomas Talbert and in the attempted murder of Reverend Stanley Archer.”

That startled her. “What do you mean, the attempted murder?”

“Somebody shot at him tonight in his home. Fortunately, they missed, but the intent was to kill him, there is no doubt about that. I was present. The assailant was a woman. It was your maid, Faith.”

She stared at him in horror but made no protest.

“Where is she? I’d like to speak to her.”

“I’m afraid that won’t be possible. I have sent her back to New York.”

“How long ago did she leave?”

“Some time ago.”

Murdoch pointed to the telephone set on the desk. “I would like to make a call, ma’am.”

“By all means.”

Murdoch could see how much his news had upset her. She hadn’t known anything about the shooting.

Fortunately, the unctuous clerk, Oatley, hadn’t yet left, and Murdoch was able to get him to connect him with the police station. He gave the order to send two constables to Union Station and gave a description of the maid. “She is armed and dangerous.”

Mrs. Dittman had hardly seemed interested in his call, and when he returned to his seat, she said, “A few moments ago, you said I was implicated in the deaths of a Mr. Cooke and a Mr. Talbert. What do you mean by *implicated*?”

"You were complicit in the whipping of Daniel Cooke. You were present and a witness to the shooting of Thomas Talbert."

"I see." She had laced her fingers in her lap and had been studying her hands and now she looked up at him. "I said I would be honest with you, sir, and I will be. I am totally responsible for the deaths of those two men. Daniel Cooke died more by God's hand than by mine, but in the case of Thomas Talbert, I was the one who shot him."

"You realize that I will have to arrest you?"

"Yes, I do realize that and I am prepared for it."

"Mrs. Dittman -"

"That is not my real name. I borrowed it."

"Should I call you Mrs. Cooke then?"

"No!" she spat out the word. "But I see you have discovered me, Mr. Murdoch."

"I paid a visit to Reverend Archer. You were there shortly before me, I believe?"

"Yes. He was an old friend. I was sorry to see his state. I am relieved that he was unhurt. That had nothing to do with me."

"I know you did not pull the trigger, if that's what you mean."

"I repeat, the attempt on his life had nothing to do with me. I swear to you I am not implicated in that, as I am with the other two deaths."

"Forgive me saying so, ma'am, but I don't believe you alone would have had the strength to haul up Mr. Cooke to the rafters, or to whip him in that way."

"You would be surprised what strength passion can bestow on a person, Mr. Murdoch. I have had many cruel years to contemplate what sort of revenge I would visit on Daniel Cooke. Thirty-nine stripes seemed fitting. I had to endure them more than once."

Murdoch spoke gently. "Mrs. Archer has told me your story."

Again she returned to studying her fingers. "I expect she told you I was sold as a slave many years ago."

"Yes."

"What she probably didn't tell you, Mr. Murdoch, because nobody here knew, was that my husband of one week was the one who sold me."

Murdoch had suspected as much.

"He received three hundred dollars. The slave trader resold me for four hundred. I should say that it seemed like a sign from God that Daniel had that precise amount of money in his safe."

"Which you stole?"

"*Stole* is a harsh word, Mr. Murdoch. It suggests I participated in a robbery. In fact, I was merely recovering my dowry, you might say. I took what was mine."

"And you whipped him until he had an apoplectic attack and continued to whip him after that?"

"Yes."

She was watching him defiantly. He changed tack.

"He must have been shocked to receive your message."

"He was, indeed. His crime returned from the grave. He was still quite pale when he arrived at the stable. I suppose he thought I was dead."

"Yes. He did. He had received a letter from a doctor saying he'd been there at your deathbed."

"He must have bribed him. It would have given him an excuse to stop searching. I had no encounter with a physician, even perhaps when I needed to, until recently." For a moment her thoughts turned inward, and Murdoch didn't have to guess what she meant by that.

He brought her back to the present. "I understand your motive concerning Cooke, but why did you shoot your own father?"

She frowned as if he were rather a dull student and she the teacher. "Because he was complicitous. I saw his signature on the bill of sale."

"According to Mrs. Archer, your father had nothing at all to do with the kidnapping. He almost went bankrupt trying to find you. Signatures are easy to forge."

She stiffened. "I don't know if that is the case."

"Is that why you threw money onto his body?"

"Yes. Judas wages."

"And then you placed him into the Spanish Stoop?"

"Yes, that is correct."

Murdoch leaned toward her.

"Miss Talbert, you promised to tell the truth, but you are not doing so. I think you have sent your maid away so she cannot speak for herself. A witness says that a man and a woman visited Thomas Talbert the evening he was killed. Perhaps you went there with Elijah Green."

"Who is that?"

"The man from the stables? The man that Faith spoke to when she was getting the lie of the land."

"Why do you say that? I don't know him."

"Miss Talbert, when you were talking to the Reverend Archer, he was confused. He thought you were your own mother. But you were inquiring about a boy named Isaiah. I assume that you were asking about your own son."

She moved away from him. "I have no son."

"I think you do, ma'am. He was rescued as an infant and brought to Toronto by way of the Underground Railroad. He was adopted and he is a grown man. His name is now Elijah Green."

Murdoch waited, and he felt as if the entire world was balanced on the edge of a razor.

"Was Green your accomplice, Miss Talbert? Was he helping you to get your revenge? He didn't know Thomas was his grandfather or that his mother had been married to Daniel Cooke and been cruelly betrayed. Did you tell him and ask for his help?"

"No! Absolutely not. I have never met the man you speak of. Faith was the one who spoke to him when she

went to the barn to inquire about a carriage. No, you must believe me, I have had nothing to do with him."

She could contain herself no longer and she burst into deep, gulping sobs, all the more painful to watch because they were almost soundless. Murdoch stood up and went over to her, putting his hand on her shoulder.

"Your maid was your accomplice, wasn't she?"

She could not speak at first, then she looked at him through her tears. "Yes, she was."

"Did she whip Daniel Cooke?"

She nodded. "I also took part at first, but when we saw that he had died, she continued."

"She was the one who shot your father?"

"Yes. I was accusing him of betraying me and he went to come over to me, perhaps to convince me he was innocent. She thought he was going to attack me and shot him."

"Then she tied him into the Spanish Stoop?"

"Yes. I was not present when she did that."

"You didn't know she had made an attempt on the life of the Reverend Archer, did you?"

"No, I did not."

"Were you aware that she also attacked me? She put me in the Spanish Stoop. She said she was teaching me a lesson."

Emeline drew in her breath sharply. "I did not know that either. I am sorry. I was distressed after you left here. I suppose she was referring to that. She was ever my bulldog." She caught his hand and held on to it as if she were drowning. "Mr. Murdoch, please believe me. I did not know about Elijah Green until this moment. He does not know of my existence, and I swear I have not involved him in any of my affairs." She looked at him beseechingly.

"I believe you, ma'am."

Her body almost collapsed as she sank back with relief into the couch.

"Thank you."

"Forgive me for bringing such grief upon you, ma'am. Reverend Archer did not know Elijah was your child, and Elijah has grown up not knowing that Thomas Talbert was his grandfather. I don't believe he even knows he was adopted."

She shifted slightly on the couch, and he saw pain shoot across her face. "As I am sure you have guessed, Mr. Murdoch, my life's thread is about to be shorn in two. I assume you will arrest me now?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"For being an accessory?"

"That's right."

She gave him a wry smile. "Mr. Murdoch, I must have you know that Faith, or Fidelia, as is her real name, is not in any way my servant. We took those roles because we could move freely about the country. She is my dearest friend, truly my soul sister."

"I see."

"I have told *you* the truth about what happened, but I will not repeat that to a judge. No, it will be useless for you to try to make me. I will deny I ever said what I have said to you. But I have seen the sin of my ways, and I intend to confess to the murder of both Daniel Cooke and Thomas Talbert. I worked alone and unaided."

"I cannot go along with that, ma'am. I will have to report what you have said."

"Of course. But I tell you now that I was saying all those things only to avoid being charged. I am totally responsible. I do have a plausible motive, after all. A jury will believe me."

"I intend to find your ma - your friend."

She gave him a wan smile. "Fiddie and I long ago learned to get out of tight corners, Mr. Murdoch. She won't be at the train station. You will never find her."

She reached out as if to touch his hand, but she stopped herself.

“Mr. Murdoch, you took me by surprise a little while ago. I consider myself a shrewd judge of character, and I must now throw myself on your mercy. It will serve no good purpose for, er, for Elijah Green to know that I am his natural mother. He has a family. He appears to have lived a good life to this point. Why should I shatter that with the news that his mother is a murderess who killed his own grandfather? You seem a man of conscience, Mr. Murdoch. I beg you to give me your promise that you will not reveal this to him. As you can see, I am ill. I have a tumour that is eating my stomach. There is nothing to be done. Please, keep my secret, Mr. Murdoch. It is the last wish of a dying woman.”

Murdoch hesitated. He couldn't see much would be served by bringing Green into the picture. The selling into slavery was enough reason for the revenge that Emeline had long sought. The newspapers would rejoice in that.

“Please, Mr. Murdoch,” she said again.

“Very well. I promise I won't tell him or anybody else unless I deem it absolutely necessary to the case in question.”

She placed her hand on his. “Thank you again, sir. I'm sorry that I will put you in a rather difficult position, but I know it is for the best. You simply first heard the panicky ramblings of a distraught woman. I repeat, I am totally responsible and that is what I will say from now on.”

She got to her feet and paused while a wave of pain rippled through her body.

“Perhaps you would be so good as to bring my valise.”

EPILOGUE

Murdoch was lying close beside Amy. It was almost midnight, and she had been waiting for him to return from the jail. The doctor who had examined her immediately placed Emeline Talbert in the infirmary. She was not going to live long enough to go to trial, so Judge Rose was content to accept her supposed confession and leave things as they stood. The wondrous thing was that when the story had been reported in the newspapers in all its lurid details, Mrs. Archer had gone to visit her. "God in His infinite Wisdom has given her punishment enough," she said. "It is not for me to judge her." Soon afterwards, a few members of the Queen Street Baptist Church had also begun to visit, and Murdoch thought Emeline was comforted by their company. He himself went every two or three days. At first, Emeline was aloof, but he never pressed her to retract her story about the crimes and she gradually relaxed in his presence.

"How is she tonight?" Amy whispered.

"Weaker. She may last one or two more days, if that."

Amy stroked his thigh. "You have been kind to her, Will."

"She has been dreadfully mistreated. After she escaped from captivity, she and Faith, or Fidelia as she sometimes calls her, settled in New York. She managed to build a decent-enough life for herself, at first by writing letters for those who couldn't, then by owning property. She is quite a wealthy woman, I understand. When she found out she was

dying, the poison of her hatred overwhelmed her, and she decided to return to Toronto to avenge herself on her betrayers."

And the half-acknowledged longing to find out if her son had lived or not. He hadn't told Amy that part of Emeline's story.

"Is there any chance you will find her maid or, should I say, her lover?"

"No, not her lover, but a beloved one certainly. And no, I don't think we will find her."

They were quiet for a moment, then Murdoch rolled over onto his side and gazed into Amy's face. In the candlelight, she looked soft and young, her hair loose about her shoulders.

"What's the matter? You have something on your mind. Do you not want me any more? Are you beginning to see what being involved with a policeman means? Long hours, strange habits?"

She gave him a quick smile. "It's none of those things, Will."

"What then? There's something going on."

"There is something I have to tell you."

He experienced a twinge of anxiety, never quite sure of her even though tonight she seemed especially fond and loving.

"What? For God's sake, Amy, don't keep me in suspense."

She took a deep breath. "Tomorrow, I want you to go to Father Fair and have him put up the banns."

He sat straight up in bed in astonishment. "You'll marry me, after all?"

She nodded. "Give me your hand."

He did so and she guided it to her belly. "I don't care a nickel about marriage, but this one deserves a proper start in life."

Murdoch yelped. "This one? What do you mean, this one?"

"What do you think I mean? I am with child and you, I assure you, are the father."

Murdoch's eyes filled with sudden tears.

"Amy, my dearest, dearest girl."

He pulled her to him so tightly she exclaimed in pain.

"You had better not squeeze me quite so hard, Will, or you might remove the reason I am taking such a step beyond my principles."

He loosened his grip sufficiently so that he could look at her, and he saw and finally accepted that she loved him and he wept. Laughing, Amy wiped away his tears with the sleeve of her nightgown.

"And I thought all this time you were a tough-hearted policeman."

"I am, I will be, it's just that you took me by surprise. To have you and a family of our own is more than I can encompass." He was forced to stop.

Amy sat up and stared into his face.

"William Murdoch, will you stop it? I'll have to send Charlie for Dr. Ogden."

His tears turned into laughter. "Oh no, please don't. She'll bring the professor and he'll attach me to one of his machines and study me the way you told me he did with poor Mary Blong."

"And so he should. But she was a fake and is cured, whereas I believe you are quite genuine, a hardened case and an odd one to boot."

He touched her. "I know a good way to convince you of my normality."

She smiled, and they lay together for a while not saying much, Murdoch absorbing her news. Then he said, "Amy, I want your opinion about something. When is it permissible to break a promise?"

She propped herself on her elbow. "Oh, Will, I'm not your confessor. What do you mean? I hope this hasn't anything to do with what I've just told you. You're changing your mind?"

"Of course not. But what if you had given somebody your solemn promise, but circumstances now seem different and you think a greater good would be served by breaking that promise?"

She reached up and kissed him on the lips. "You are such a dear, good man, William Murdoch, few people would torment themselves with this question. Have you made a promise you wish to break?"

"Yes."

"Then I am sure you will not do it lightly and the greater good will be served."

He sighed. "In that case, I have to get out of bed right away."

"No!"

"I'm afraid so."

"At this time of night?"

"Time is what we don't have. I must bring two people together, one of whom does not know of the other's existence and God help me, I think he should." He turned to her. "Will you promise me you'll be here when I get back?"

"Of course. Isn't that what wives do, wait for their husbands to get home?"

"Amy Slade, was that an old-fashioned viewpoint I just heard coming out of your mouth?"

"It was. Sometimes tradition embodies wisdom."

"Do you promise me then?"

"I do. Until death us do part."

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The germ of the idea for this book came from a true story, that of James Mink and his daughter, which is a significant part of black history in Toronto. However, like most writers, I have gone on from there, and the plot and events of this book are entirely fiction.

The ideas, some of the actions, and many of the words I attribute to Professor Broske I took from an astonishing book, *Fear*, written by Angelo Mosso in 1893.

The Ollapod Club is an amalgam of the many such rehabilitation centres that flourished in the 1890s. Many of the principles we use in our attempts to deal with alcoholism were also used then. I have not included anything that was not done at the time, I've just attributed them to one club.

By 1896, bare-knuckle or prize fighting, as it was sometimes called, was illegal. I don't know whether a fight took place in Mimico, but other than that I have been as true as possible to the rituals and language of these events.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank the people who shared their expertise with me while I was writing this book, especially Cindy Boht, who knows horses as well as she knows dogs, and Anthony, Jayne, and Jim, who allowed themselves to be twisted out of shape for a few painful moments to demonstrate the positions I needed to see.

Al Greene took time out of a busy schedule to talk about his life growing up in North Carolina; Stanley Grizzle kindly shared his house and his time so I could talk to him about the life of a black man in early Toronto.

As always, thanks must be given to my astute editor, Dinah Forbes, and my agent, Jane Chelius.

Any errors of fact are mine.

If you enjoyed The Murdoch Mysteries, you'll love Maureen Jennings's new series, The Tom Tyler Mysteries.

Read on for an excerpt from *Season of Darkness* ...

Prologue

Drawing the chair closer to the table, he sat down and shook a cigarette from the pack. He lit it and took a few deep draws, so that the tip glowed red. He'd already folded the handkerchief, and now he picked it up and stuffed it in his mouth. It wasn't that he doubted his own resolve, there was no question of that, but he'd learned to accept the body's instinctive weaknesses and to make allowances. The walls of this house were thin and he didn't want to risk being heard .

He raised his bare left arm and studied for a moment the small tattoo just below his armpit. Then, deliberately, he pressed the tip of the cigarette into his flesh and held it there. Sweat broke out on his forehead and he bit down on the handkerchief. When he thought he had accomplished what he needed to, he lifted the cigarette away. The stench of burning flesh was nauseating but he welcomed it. He'd smelled it before and it reminded him that he was a soldier. He spat out the handkerchief and leaned forward, hands on his knees, head bent until his breathing slowed. He allowed one soft moan to come from his lips. Then he took the tin of salve from the table beside him and applied it carefully to the wound .

He got up, went over to the tiny window, and looked down at the street below. A young woman was walking by pushing a pram. She was pretty in her red and white flowered frock, the early spring sun creating a halo of her fair hair. She bent over the pram, attending to a child he couldn't see .

He went to the table where he'd placed a bottle of brandy. He poured himself a tall glass full, picked up his cigarette, and took another deep puff. He studied the glowing end. Ignoring the gag this time, he lifted his right arm and, with his left hand, pressed the tip of the cigarette against the soft flesh of his underarm .

He held it there until he could stand it no longer .

1.

IN SPITE OF THE FACT THAT SHE 'D GOT ONLY A FEW hours sleep, Elsie Bates was in great spirits. Nothing like a nice bit of dock to make a girl smile. When he'd told her this was his first time, she'd expected him to be clumsy and done too fast, but he wasn't. She'd helped him out here and there but mostly he'd learned all by himself. Of course, like any man born to Eve, he'd started to show a bit of possessiveness right off the bat, and she'd had to make it clear that nobody owned her. Elsie grinned at the memory, then impulsively pushed down on the accelerator as far as she dared. The sun wasn't yet up and the road, which was hemmed in on either side by tall hedgerows, was pitch black. She had her headlights on, inadequate as they were with the strips of blackout tape across them, and she was driving as close to the middle of the road as she could, the lorry rattling and shaking on the rough surface.

She started to sing to the tune of the "Colonel Bogey March."

Hitler has only got one ball ,

Goering has two but they are small

Wait 'til she told Rose about last night. Rosie kept saying she was saving herself, but as Elsie reminded her, "There's a war on, my pet. Butter's rationed but that don't mean we have to be."

Himmler has something sim'lar ,

But poor old Goebbels has no balls at all .

Elsie fingered the strap of her dungarees and smiled at the feel of the two bank notes she'd sewn in there. Two quid would go a long way. When she'd told Rose the story, her friend had been nervous.

"Oo, Elsie, be careful. People don't like to be blackmailed."

"Who said anything about blackmail? I didn't say nothing. Nothing at all except to mention what I'd seen, and out it popped: 'Ow much to keep that to yourself? Didn't come from me first.'" She'd pinched Rose's thin cheek. "We won't be greedy. The occasional quid will do nicely. Stroke of luck, weren' it? Me being there at that moment. Next leave we get, we're going to Birmingham for a few larks. Nobody'll wonder where the dosh is coming from. If asked, we'll say it's our wages saved up, which is a joke."

"You're as cunning as an old cat," said Rose. "I just hope you've got as many lives."

Elsie had taken the remark as a compliment. She'd learned at too early an age to be that way. You had to if you were going to get out of that bleeding hellhole of a slum in any way intact. She made the sign of the cross over her chest. "May God see fit to drop a bomb on all of them."

Hitler has only got one ball ,

The other is on the kitchen wall .

His mother, the dirty bugger ,

Cut it off when he was small .

The lorry went over a bump, gave a short cough, a splutter or two, then went silent and began to roll to a stop.

"Sod it, not again."

It was the third time this month the bloody thing had acted up. Elsie managed to steer over to the side, as close to the hedgerow as possible, before the momentum died.

The road was barely wide enough for two vehicles to pass, and she'd bring a lot of aggravation onto herself if she blocked the way completely. She tried turning the ignition key but the lorry was dead as a doornail. Sod, sod, and more sod. She was on a tight schedule. She had to pick up the girls at the hostel on time. Miss Stillwell, the warden, could be a bloody tartar. "Late again, Miss Bates? Do pull up your socks, or I shall have to put you on report." Toffee-nosed old cow. If ever a woman acted like a dried-up spinster, it was her.

Well, no sense in sitting here on her arse. Good thing she'd brought her bike. She climbed down from the lorry. Somewhere along the way her back light had been knocked out, but the front lamp was working. Not that it was a lot of use, with the obligatory taped strips across it.

The woods pressed in close here, narrowing the road even more. Elsie didn't like the country in the dark. She was used to paved streets and houses crammed together; a sense of the surrounding humanity. You could go for miles out here and not meet a soul. The rooks were putting up a God-awful clamour. Old Morgan had told them that sometimes birds can be as good as a watch dog, giving off warnings that there's danger near.

She almost wished she'd brought the gun with her.

As she pedalled, she began to sing again to the tune of "Land of Hope and Glory."

Land of soap and water

Hitler's having a bath

Churchill's looking through the keyhole

Having a jolly good laugh

Be ... e ... e ... e ... cause ,

Hitler has only one small ball ...

She was glad for her overcoat. The pre-dawn air was chill and damp, just a bit of a hint that summer was ending. Fresh though, very fresh; one good thing you could say for the country. Since she'd been here, she gained some weight and a good colour, which they had all admitted when she went home last time. After she'd signed up with the Land Army, her dad, the miserable bugger, had said she wouldn't last a week, which only made her determined to show him. It hadn't been easy. When she'd first arrived in Shropshire, she'd never even seen a live cow before, let alone the bloody huge bull with the ring in its wet nose and its enormous goolies hanging down. The work in the fields was backbreaking, the hours appallingly long, and at first many of the farmers had been contemptuous of the girls, not willing to take into account their inexperience. Now the Land girls had earned their grudging respect. They worked as hard as men and learned fast. Elsie, herself, had been promoted to forewoman after only two months. When she'd written to tell Ma and Dad and the others, nobody'd bothered to answer. Sod them anyway.

Dawn was starting to seep through the trees and the exercise was getting her blood flowing. She kicked her feet off the pedals and did a little swoop from side to side just for fun. *Whoopee!* There was something to be said about this war. She'd never have had this experience stuck in the filthy London back-to-back housing where she'd grown up. She kicked out again. *Whoopee!* There was a dance in the village tonight and she'd be there, new frock, new sweetheart.

Hold on, was that a car? Maybe she could cadge a lift. She glanced over her shoulder. She heard the roar of the car as it emerged out of the darkness, the slitted headlights gleaming like cat's eyes. It was travelling fast. Too fast. Elsie swerved out of the way.

"Hey, slow down," she yelled.

But in a moment the car was upon her.

2.

TOM TYLER , DETECTIVE INSPECTOR , SHROPSHIRE constabulary, was having another of his unpolicemanlike dreams. Ever since he'd run into Clare at the market a few days ago, he'd been dreaming about her. Sometimes, they were quarrelling and he was shouting at her, the way he had when she had told him all those years ago she was leaving. Sometimes the dream was unbearably sweet and he was lying with her in his arms. This time, he was trying to find her, running through the empty streets of Whitchurch, calling her name. He'd actually been crying. The pain of that loss was already bringing him to the surface of consciousness when he felt somebody shaking him on the shoulder.

"Dad. Dad. Wake up. You're wanted on the telephone."

He opened his eyes. His daughter, Janet, was standing beside the bed.

"Who is it?" he said, his tongue thick. Too much booze last night.

"Sir Percy Somerville. He says it's urgent."

Groaning, Tyler sat up, waiting until the room stopped spinning before he ventured to stand.

"Gosh, Dad, you smell of beer. That must have been a super party."

"It was a victory party and don't be cheeky." He yawned.

"Did Sir P. say what he wanted?"

"Mom was the one who answered. All I know is he said it was urgent."

Vera's voice, shrill and irritated, came up from downstairs.

"What are you doing? Sir Percy's waiting."

Tyler winked at his daughter. "I need to go to the loo first. Tell your mom to say I'll call him right back."

Janet headed for the door, then turned. "Dad, I need to talk to you."

He regarded her. There were dark circles underneath her eyes and her normally sunny expression had disappeared.

"What's up, sweetheart?"

"I can't get into it now. Can we talk when you come home?"

"Of course. What is it, boy troubles?"

She flinched and answered sharply. "No. Nothing like that."

Oops. He'd trod on a sensitive topic, obviously. "You don't have to take my head off, Jan."

"Sorry, Dad ... I ..."

 She didn't finish and left.

He shuffled off to the toilet. His mouth was foul and his intestines felt as if somebody had had a go at them with a scrubbing brush. Relief from his bladder achieved, he pulled the chain, leaning for a moment over the toilet bowl, wondering if he was going to be sick. No, it seemed all right. He padded into the adjoining bathroom and stared into the mirror. He stuck out his tongue. Ugh. You could run a comb through that fur. His complexion was fair, the kind that goes with carrot red hair, and yesterday's sun had burned his nose and flamed his cheeks. He'd been in the open air all day, first visiting some of the local farmers to check their stock, and later playing football. His team had won the game and it was definitely worth a bit of peeling.

Moving as fast as his head would allow, he shaved, and rinsed out his mouth. Finally, he went slowly downstairs, still the worse for wear, not completely awake but at least alive.

He could see Vera wiping at something on the kitchen table. He had the feeling it was where he'd dribbled jam late last night when he'd tried to make himself a piece of toast. He'd hear about that one.

“Morning.” Once he would have kissed her; now they didn’t even exchange pecks.

“Take your time why don’t you? Sir Percy is waiting.” There was a tight knot between her eyebrows. “You were late coming home last night.”

“I know, I know, but it’s not every day the Wolverines win a championship. The lads had to celebrate.” He poured himself a glass of water and gulped some down. “Did Percy say what he wanted at this ungodly hour?”

“No, but he was in a real tizzy. You’d better give him a ring right away.” Vera was already dressed in her flowered house frock, her hair combed and pinned back. She must have been up at the crack of dawn. “Had a bad night, did you?”

She had turned away from him and he hardly heard the question.

“Why’d you say that?” he asked, startled.

“First, if you’ll excuse the expression, you’ve got a face on you that would turn milk sour, and second, you were moaning and twitching in your sleep like the devil was after you.”

He pushed away the feeling of guilt over his dream. Vera was very perceptive where he was concerned, but surely not even she could read his mind.

He shrugged. “One too many, I suppose.”

Taking the glass of water with him, he walked into the minuscule hall and picked up the telephone. The operator’s cheery voice came on the line first. “Number, please.”

“Hello, Mavis. It’s Tom here. Get me Beeton Manor, will you? I want to speak to Sir Percy.”

“Tom? What were you lads up to last night? Charlie came home drunk as a lord and singing at the top of his voice. He woke up the whole neighbourhood.”

Tyler groaned to himself, his memory of the final stages of the celebration lost in a beery haze.

“Good thing he’s got a fine voice, Mavis. How is he this morning?”

"I haven't the foggiest idea. When I left he was dead to the world."

"Well, he did score the winning goal. He deserves to celebrate."

Mavis chuckled. "I suppose you're right. It has been a long time coming. Hold on, I'll connect you with Sir Percy. He sounds upset." There was a short pause and Tyler drank some more water. He felt as if he were trying to irrigate the Sahara.

Then Mavis was back.

"Go ahead please, Sir Percy."

The magistrate's rumbly, slightly neighing voice came over the line. "Tyler. We've got a nasty incident on our hands."

"What is it, sir?"

"There's been an accident. Very serious. I can't go into details over the phone, don't you know, but I need you to come at once."

"And where will you be, sir?" Tyler asked before the magistrate could hang up.

"Oh, yes. The incident seems to have occurred a mile or so above Ash Magna. On the Heath Road, not far from the crossroads. I'll meet you there."

Tyler hung up and went back into the kitchen.

Vera pushed a large cup of tea across the table. "What's up? Sins catching up with you?"

"For God's sake, Vera, put a sock in it. There's been an accident on the Heath Road. Bloody blackout again, probably."

She wasn't that contrite. "That'll probably take you all day to sort out. Just so you know, I'm at the Institute for the evening. It's bandage night. Dad gave me a nice pork chop for your tea. I'll leave it in the oven and you can warm it up when you get back."

Vera was nothing if not dutiful.

He reached for his hat and coat, which he vaguely remembered dropping on the floor when he came home but which were now on a hook by the door.

Vera wasn't done with carping. "I want you to have a word with your daughter. She's been late for work three times this past fortnight, and you know how Dad is such a stickler for punctuality. She'll get the sack if she's not careful, granddaughter or no granddaughter."

Janet had been adamant about leaving school and "doing her bit" for the war effort, and Vera had pushed for her to go into the family business. Tyler knew that his daughter hated her job at the butcher's shop his father-in-law owned. He wasn't surprised she was in no hurry to get there.

Vera shook her head. "What with her and our Jimmy acting so strange, I'm worried sick about the two of them. Jimmy doesn't come home until the wee hours. You don't even know, but I hear him. And he must have already gone out. No breakfast, no notice, nothing. He's not himself at all."

She looked so worried, he softened toward her. "I thought he was looking more chipper lately. I'll wager he's found himself a lassie."

Her expression changed abruptly. "Not everybody has that on their mind every minute of the day."

So much for softening.

He grabbed his hat and coat and picked up his cup of tea. "I'll take this with me."

When he stepped out of the house, he stood and gulped down some of the tea. Not quite the hair of the dog, but it would have to do. The intensity of his dream about Clare hadn't really faded, but there wasn't anything he could do about that. He wondered when he'd next see her.

He crossed the road to the tiny car park at the rear of the station where the sole police vehicle, an ancient Humber, was kept. As far as he was concerned, the wretched thing was more of a liability than an asset, but they had to make

do with it. A lot of the time it refused to start, and he thought a trotting cow could move faster.

He forced himself to control his impatience and turn the crank steadily until the engine caught. Before it could change its mind, he jumped in and drove off.

The houses were bathed in the soft, golden light of early morning; cattle grazed on the green, lush hills behind the town. People bought postcards of places like this. England at its most beautiful. Whitchurch was too rural to be of interest to the Luftwaffe, and so far the bombers hadn't touched it. It was only when you saw the black wreaths on some of the doors; only when you noticed that the shop windows were displaying fewer and fewer wares; only at night, when the streets went dark in compliance with the blackout regulations; only then did you have to acknowledge the old life had gone forever.

Tyler was in no mood to dwell on those thoughts, although they weren't ever that far from his mind. Right now, he was concentrating on coaxing as much speed as he could out of the Humber. When he reached the turnoff, he was forced to slow down. The Heath Road was rough, dotted with potholes, and he couldn't risk breaking an axle. He'd driven no more than five minutes when he saw a Land Army lorry at the side of the road. There was no one in the driver's seat, and he felt a pang of alarm. Over the summer, he'd seen some of the Land girls who were billeted here. They seemed a grand bunch. He hoped one of them hadn't got into an accident.

He picked up as much speed as he dared and rounded another bend, stopping just short of Sir Percy's big white Bentley. The magistrate was standing beside a lanky older man in soldier's uniform. It was Ron Ellwood, a man Tyler knew from town. He could see how relieved both men were to see him. What on earth had happened?

As Tyler parked the Humber and got out, Sir Percy hurried over to him, hand outstretched. Ellwood gave him a crisp

salute, presented arms, then stood at attention with his rifle at his side.

“Ah, Tyler, thank goodness,” said the magistrate. His hand was cold, the handshake the usual limp kind he always gave. “The, er ... the victim is over there.”

There was a tarpaulin a few feet away in a narrow pass-by. A swarm of flies hovered above the mound.

Tyler walked over, and pulled back the cover.

Underneath was the body of a young woman. She appeared to have been shot.

Her left temple was completely shattered. Pieces of white bone protruded from the blood and brain tissue.

“Oh, Lord. I know this girl,” exclaimed Tyler. “Her name was Elsie Bates.”

3.

TYLER LEANED OVER AND BRUSHED AWAY THE BUZZING flies. The congealing blood had sealed closed one of her eyes; the other, once blue, now already darkening, stared at him. The entire left side of her face and throat was caked with blood, as was the front of her tan coat. Gingerly, he pulled the tarpaulin farther down. Her snug dungarees were tucked into dusty gum boots and appeared to be undisturbed. Thank God for that.

The girl's arms were beside her, and a gun was lying underneath the fingers of her right hand.

"Look at that, will you," exclaimed Sir Percy. He couldn't keep the tremor out of his voice. "God forbid, have we got a suicide here?"

"I don't think so, sir. The wound is on the wrong side of her head for one thing. It would be on the right if she'd done it herself." Besides, Tyler couldn't believe this girl would kill herself. Not Elsie Bates with her palpable hunger for life. He'd last seen her on Saturday night as she walked down the street to the church hall where the dances were held. Her skirt swung around her tanned knees, her scarlet lipstick drew attention to her full lips.

He eased the gun free, holding it carefully by the tip of the barrel, then shook out his handkerchief, wrapped the gun, and examined it more closely. It was an older model German Luger p -08. The stock was blue and the letter *B* was carved on one side. He slipped off the safety catch, removed the magazine, and cracked it open. Only one bullet had been fired, and that recently.

He put it aside and turned his attention back to the body. Elsie had brown, straight hair, which she wore parted down the middle and swept up at the sides, where it was secured with two plain green combs. It was neat and tidy. Carefully, he lifted each limp hand. In life, they had been strong and capable, the palms showing signs of calluses and the fingernails cut short. What he'd expect from a Land Army girl. There was no smell of cordite on the hands, no sign of gun residue, no blood.

Curiously, there was a bunch of white flowers lying on her chest.

"Did you put these here?" he asked Ellwood.

"No, I didn't. Can't say I even noticed them. I just wanted to cover 'er up as fast as possible."

Tyler laid the flowers on the grass. They were white poppies.

Sir Percy inched closer and peered down. "Are they significant, Tom? I know all those conchies sell them. They're the emblem of the Peace Pledge Union. She's a Land Army girl. I can't imagine her being in with the Bolsheviks."

"I've no idea. They grow all around here and these are fresh."

He fished in the pockets of the dungarees. There was a shilling and a motor car key in one pocket, a packet of cigarettes and a handkerchief in the other. He put the key in his own pocket and placed the other items beside the flowers.

She was partly propped up against the hedge, and he slipped his arm around her shoulders, bringing her body forward. Her head tilted sickeningly to the side before he could stop it.

"The bullet exit wound is here, right at the base, but there's hardly any blood on the hedge where you'd expect it to be. Corporal, did you move her?"

“No, sir. She were exactly where she is now. All I did was cover her with a tarpaulin we had in the lorry.”

At that moment, the sun winked through the trees and glinted red on a nearby sharp-edged rock. Tyler lowered the body gently and walked over to the spot. He dropped to his haunches.

“There’s blood here.” He saw the metal bullet casing lying about two feet away, and picked it up. “This is definitely where she was shot. I doubt she put a gun to her head over here, blew out her brains, then got up and sat down against the hedge.”

The grass along the verge was slightly flattened and he could see scuff marks in the dust of the road. Here and there were more splotches of blood. “And then she was dragged over to the pass-by ... We’re looking at a homicide, all right.”

“She’s just a young lass,” said Sir Percy. “What savage would do a thing like this?”

Tyler indicated the gun. “Whoever they are, they used a Luger.”

“Gracious me, Tom, surely you’re not suggesting we have a Jerry paratrooper prowling around?”

“Off hand, I’d say that’s very unlikely. I don’t know why Jerry would drop off a parachutist in rural Shropshire unless it was to subvert the cows. And if it was a Jerry, I’d think he’d take his gun with him. Besides which, it’s an older model. The stamp says it was manufactured in 1917. It could belong to anybody. Guns like this aren’t that difficult to obtain. A lot of soldiers brought them back from the Great War as souvenirs.”

“Quite true,” said Sir Percy. “I meself picked up a couple of cap badges.”

“If it’s a German gun you’re after, sir,” said Ellwood, “there are plenty of Krauts over in the internment camp.”

“Surely they’re all under guard?” Sir Percy wiped at his damp face. His white handkerchief would have been

adequate as a flag of surrender.

"According to what I've heard," said Ellwood, "security at the camp is lax."

Tyler knew that was true. Nobody considered the enemy aliens a serious threat to national security anymore, and the fear of invasion was abating. His own son, who had sentry duty occasionally, had remarked that the internees were mostly soft-bellied, middle-aged eggheads. But it was also true the majority were German. Like most people who were imprisoned behind barbed wire, they probably were able to maintain a brisk business in barter. A Luger for a packet of cigarettes.

He straightened up. "Who found the body?"

"I did," answered Ellwood. "At least, that is to say, me and Private Walker did."

Sir Percy jumped in. "Walker arrived on my doorstep, and frankly I could hardly make sense of his story because he was as hysterical as a woman. According to the corporal here, he's suffering from shell shock, which is why he's been assigned to the camp and not to active service. Feather bed, really."

"He was at Dunkirk," said Tyler.

"Quite so. Didn't mean to imply ... we have to give all those fellows some leeway then, don't we? Although as Mr. Churchill said, a retreat isn't going to win the war, and we mustn't fool ourselves, Dunkirk was a defeat."

Tyler tried not show his annoyance. It was so typical of Percy to make a tactless remark like that, the silly sod.

"Bobby Walker is a good lad," said Tyler, keeping his voice as neutral as he could. "I've known him since he was a nipper. He's a mate of my son's. They got off the beach together. By all accounts, it was a rough time."

Not that Jimmy had said much of anything. Neither one did, but Bobby Walker shook constantly and jumped at every sound. A door slamming, a car backfiring, would have him on the ceiling.

Sir Percy blew his nose. "Quite so."

"What did Private Walker say exactly?" Tyler asked.

"There's no exactly about it. All I could get out of him was that a girl was dead. I could hardly make tops nor tails of what he was saying. I suppose I should have packed him off to do his duty. Might have put a bit of steel in his backbone if he started acting more like a soldier."

He must have caught Tyler's expression because he added hastily, "Frankly, I took pity on the chap and I sent him home. Then I got hold of you, Tom, and got over here post-haste." His gaze flitted to the dead girl. "Should we cover her up, do you think?"

"I was just about to do that."

Ellwood helped him with the tarpaulin.

"What's our next step?" Sir Percy asked.

"We'll have to get the body out of here and have a postmortem done as soon as possible. I suggest we bring in Dr. Murnaghan from Whitchurch. He's retired now but he was a highly competent coroner in his day."

"Shall I ring him for you? You've got a lot to take care of here."

"Thank you. That would speed things up considerably."

Sir Percy took off his tweed cap and mopped at his head again. He was a year younger than Tyler, but his hair was already greying and sparse. Right now, it was sprouting from his head in tufts as if he'd neglected to comb it when he got out of bed. He hadn't shaved and his stubble made him look grubby and down at heel. Tyler usually saw him in magistrate's court, all shiny chin and smooth hair. This current dishevelment made him more human. That and his obvious distress. Percy wasn't cut out to be a magistrate and lord of the manor. All he wanted was to be left in peace to build up his prize herd of Ayrshires. Tyler felt the usual mixture of pity and exasperation towards him.

"I'd appreciate it if you'd also ring the station and have Sergeant Gough send me all available men," said Tyler. "I

don't want people traipsing through the area until I've had a chance to look it over. Tell him we'll need the police van and to bring the camera."

"Should we notify the war office ... in case there are parachutists?"

"Let's investigate a little further before we do that. We don't want to distract those blokes from fighting a war, do we?"

"Quite so. I'll hoof it back to the manor, then, and make those telephone calls. And I'll notify the camp that Corporal Ellwood is delayed."

"Thank you."

"Good, excellent. I will wait for your further report." He dithered. "I was planning to take a run up to Edinburgh on urgent business ... a rather splendid bull I've been told about. I'm afraid I'll be incommunicado for a few days. That is, unless you need me here."

"That's all right. This is *my* job."

"Quite so." The magistrate's relief was palpable. He gave Tyler another hurried handshake and went back to his Bentley. With a hiss of tires, he backed up and drove away.

Tyler turned to the corporal. "Ron, give me your version, for God's sake."

4.

LIKE MANY LOCAL MEN WHO WERE TOO OLD FOR ACTIVE service but were still reservists, Ron Ellwood, a veteran of the Great War, had been enlisted as a guard at the camp on Prees Heath. There were over a thousand men incarcerated there, most of them classified as enemy aliens. As Jimmy had said, they were typically German intellectuals and professional men living in England who hadn't got their nationalization papers in order. They had been swept up in the fear of invasion that gripped the country after Dunkirk.

Tyler liked and respected Ellwood. He took a packet of cigarettes from his pocket and offered one. Ellwood leaned his rifle against a tree and accepted gratefully.

"I picked up Bobby Walker about six-thirty. He lives on Green Lane, and we always take the Alkington Road to the camp because it's faster. We'd just reached the crossroads where we turn when we encountered one of them Land Army girls. She was walking along the road, pushing a bicycle. She said her friend was their forewoman, and she was more than a half-hour late getting to the hostel where she's supposed to pick them up."

"They're the girls who've been billeted in Beeton Manor, aren't they?"

"That's it. I was surprised Sir P. didn't recognize the dead girl right off the bat. But then I didn't either, did I, although I must have seen her in town." Ellwood chewed on his lip. "It was the shock I suppose, and the mess the bullet had made of her face." He drew in a lungful of smoke. "Well, the girl said as how she thought the lorry might have broken down

seeing as it had done that before, and she was on her way to find out. She'd started off on her bike but she had a flat tire. She asked if we could give her a lift up the road a ways to see. We had a bit of extra time, so I said as how we could do that." Another deep draw on the cigarette.

"What's the girl's name, by the way?"

"Rose, Rose Watkins. A little bit of a thing she is. You'd think she was no more than thirteen to look at her."

"That's not her bike, is it?" A maroon-coloured woman's bicycle was lying by the hedge a few feet away.

"No, it isn't. That one was there when we come up. We put Rose's in the back of the lorry."

Tyler went to have a look. "This one is certainly a good one. Not an official government issue like most of the girls have to ride. The back light is cracked, but other than that, it's in good shape." The cloud of flies was getting more dense and a few curious birds had hopped closer.

"Did Rose see the body?"

"She did. Me, I knew right off something serious had happened." He gave a little cough. "I seen action in the last war, as you know, Tom, and there's a stillness to a dead body that is unmistakable. I told Rose to stand back while Bobby and me checked, but she wouldn't. She came right up. Course, she turned white as a sheet when she saw all the blood. I was afraid she was going to faint on us. But she's tough for all she's small. She's a Londoner."

"Did she say anything?"

"She just sort of cried out, 'Oh no, Elsie. I warned you.'"

"Warned her about what?" Tyler asked.

"I don't know, Tom. She never said. Bobby had got into quite a state, shaking like a leaf. Like I said, this wasn't the first time I seen a dead body and I was thinking more clearly. Not that it wasn't a shock, it certainly was, young girl like that. I thought at least we could get Sir Percy, seeing as he's a magistrate, and he'd be likely to be on the telephone. Somebody had to stay here and I thought it best

be me, so I bundled Bobby into our lorry, telling him to take the lassie back to the billet. I ordered her not to talk to anybody. Just to say there'd been an accident. No sense in upsetting everybody until we know exactly what's happened here."

"Good thinking, Ron. You kept a cool head. What time was it when you found her?"

"It was about ten to seven. I'd say death had definitely occurred within the previous hour. She were still warm but the blood was no longer flowing."

Suddenly, there was a frantic flapping of wings and loud cawing as a flight of rooks flew out of the trees. Tyler jumped, aware his nerves were on edge. Ellwood tensed as well.

"That's probably Dr. Murnaghan coming, but I don't want anybody else driving through here. There's some police tape in my car. We can use that to create a barrier across the road. We'll stay here until reinforcements arrive."

He held out his hand to pull Ellwood to his feet.

"I don't remember anything like this happening here since Mrs. Evans clobbered her husband with a plank," said the corporal.

Tyler gave him a grim smile. "Rhys Evans was a miserable bastard who deserved what he got. It's hard to see Elsie Bates deserving this."

Born in England, MAUREEN JENNINGS taught English before becoming a psychotherapist. The first Detective Murdoch mystery was published in 1997. Six more followed, all to enthusiastic reviews. In 2003, Shaftesbury Films adapted three of the novels into movies of the week, and four years later the Murdoch Mysteries TV series was created; it is now shown around the world, including in the UK, the United States, and much of Europe. In Canada, CBC television is carrying on the series beginning in Fall 2012. Her new trilogy, set in World War II-era England, got off to a spectacular start with 2011's Season of Darkness, followed by Beware this Boy in Fall 2012. Maureen lives in Toronto with her husband and their dog and cat. Visit www.maureenjennings.com .